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Thomas Mazzocco OSB Cam.

Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University (Berkeley, CA)

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Like Living Stones

Thomas Mazzocco, OSB Cam.

Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University (Berkeley, CA)

Pope Francis recently opened a global synodal process to reflect on synodality, a powerful theme for the life and mission of our Church prompted by the communion of the body of Christ. This homiletic reflection connects synodality to the image of living stones from 1 Peter to suggest this as an appropriate image for the Christian community as we imagine and re-vision how we understand church.

Pope Francis recently opened a global synodal process to reflect on synodality, a powerful theme for the life and mission of our Church prompted by the communion of the body of Christ. Here, the action of the Spirit is exercised throughout history: women and men of all times share the mission of the people of God in the world.

But how do we understand Church? Who is the Church? The answer is crucial to understanding our role and participation in the Church's mission today. In his first letter to Christians living in Asia Minor, and to us today, Peter wrote: "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). As we listen to this passage, I wonder how this might resonate with us today. Can it help in our understanding of Church? We, the Church of God, God's people, are co-creators of our spiritual house. I immediately recall the temple, "the house of my Father," as Jesus defines it in John's Gospel, where the priests celebrated the sacrificial cult. We are the living stones, a living part of this spiritual temple, prepared by God since the beginning of time, constituted by Christ, and made manifest by the outpouring of the Spirit blowing in the vicissitudes of time and history. The Spirit dwells today in the Church, in the people of God, in our hearts, just as it did in the temple of Jesus' time.

In our journey as living stones, Jesus Christ becomes the mediator. He prepares a place for us and shows us the way. And indeed, it is not always a reassuring path: a path of prodigious works and jubilant crowds but also a path of temptations, betrayals, and death. We experience this troubled path in our everyday life and throughout history. However, the scandal of the cross and the mystery of the resurrection represent the newness of Christ. As a stone rejected by humans but chosen by and precious to God, Jesus shows us a way that is so distant from our ways. Yet, as part of the same spiritual building, it is a way that allows us to live in right relationship with ourselves, with others, with the Other.

The relational aspect of the Church appears powerfully here. A Church that is no longer vertical but horizontal in dialogue with those close to us and with Christ, the mediator and connector of living stones which are all different from each other but ordered to the same purpose. Guided by the Spirit, we are called to work for the kingdom of God, fulfilling through our hands the intimate nature and universal mission of the Church. We are active players in the history of salvation. The work of our redemption is still happening through the Spirit who dwells in us, as we dwell in this spiritual house, the Church. We nourish such a spiritual dwelling through participation in worship liturgy. As living stones, we need this nourishment.

Sharing the sacred word and the Eucharistic table allows us to experience the Christian mystery, grasping a deeper meaning of our faith. As we eat and drink, we become part of the same mystical body of Christ, as living members of his Church. Such a body is made actual and renewed through our participation in the Eucharist. Out of our weekly celebrations, we create expressions of our sacred liturgy in our daily lives and manifest to the world the mystery of Christ. We are called "to be a holy priesthood" and to become a sacramental sign of union with God. As living stones, we testify to the unity of the whole human family as we become one

spiritual house. We become part of God's salvation plan, and we reveal the one body of Christ. Our synodal process witnesses to Christ in the world, with our divine and priestly incarnation as living stones.

In our contemporary culture, we may at times feel homeless. I speak not of a material structure but of a more essential and urgent existential home. The spiritual house that we are called to embody can be countercultural. Every day, we build this holy place in the authentic encounter with our neighbors, in the dialogue that prevents us from withdrawing into ourselves, and in the experience that constitutes us as a diverse and genuinely universal, synodal, world Church. At these local synodal gatherings occurring around the world, the Holy Spirit's work in our community guides us toward this Church of authentic listening and encounter among a discipleship of equals and universal communion of saints. As living stones, we are continually invited to cooperate in building God's reign and to be active agents in realizing salvation.

So, how does Peter expect us to live as living stones? How do we build our spiritual house and participate in the community of believers? As we have seen, the idea of synodality is deeply rooted in our being Christians. At the origins of the Christian community, the Church moved in a synodal way. Throughout our history, we have lost contact with this dimension of our faith, but we are urged today to rediscover how to embody the experience of a synodal Church or, in other words, how to be living stones.

As we read from Pope Francis, communication, participation, and mission are pillars of synodality. Communication can only occur through authentic dialogue, a relationship based on listening to our neighbors. As members of God's Church and of the body of Christ, we are naturally in a relationship with one another. Also, as part of the same building, we participate, each with their gifts, in the common project of being the light of the world, a house built on the

rock. Every contribution is necessary for this process. Open to the challenges of this world, the universal Church renewed by the synodal process will be able to incarnate her mission with new enthusiasm. United in Christ, we will carry out the continuing work of salvation in our here and now. This is where, as Church, we are called to journey together.

We are invited to be living stones, part of the world Church, the spiritual building of which Christ is the cornerstone. Through the continuously renewed calling of the Spirit, we are invited to make his way our way, his truth our truth, his life our life. Like living stones, we will be able to inhabit that dwelling dreamed of by God in which Christ has prepared a place for us.