

# Beyond the temple: Living stones

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I still remember that morning in Jerusalem in front of the Wailing Wall. I, too, had put on my *yarmulke* and approached the huge stone blocks that had once held up the Temple of Israel. The place where God's presence, his glory, had been manifested for centuries! Surrounded by faithful Jews present in that place to scrutinize the Scriptures and pray, I touched that wall with emotion.

"What must Jesus have felt, attending the temple?", I wondered; the Son of God who, as a faithful Jew, came here to attend to the things of his Father (cf. Lk 2:49; Jn 2:13). What a heartbreak his weeping over Jerusalem and his prophecy: "The days will come when, of all these things you admire, there will be nothing left, there will be not one stone left on another, everything will be destroyed" (Lk 21, 6)!

But other words of Scripture also came to mind: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up". And the clarification of the fourth Gospel: "he spoke of the temple that was his body" (Jn 2, 19.21). Another temple, then: Jesus himself, the Risen One, present now in every place and every moment! Paul tells the young Christian community in Corinth: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor 3:16). As well as Peter in his First Letter: "Drawing near to him, living stone, [...] as living stones you are also built up into a spiritual building" (1 Pet 2:4-5).

With the death and resurrection of Jesus, the temple is now without boundaries, no longer confined in "sacred" space. And we are called to be its living stones there where we are in our daily lives! "What would happen if we became more fully more fully aware of that?", I asked myself, rather stunned, when I rediscover "anew" this ancient truth? What would happen if we took Jesus' observation that "the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4:23), not just in this or that other place, but in the dailiness of life?

The pandemic catapulted us out of the temple for weeks and months and suddenly we realized that perhaps we had not sufficiently developed the awareness that the temple of God is first and foremost *us*, where we live: in our homes, in our families, in our workplaces, among our colleagues... Seen in this way, the pandemic, even amidst the immense suffering, could also become a *kairòs*: an opportunity to rediscover and increase the dimensions of our

being Christians that had perhaps withered.

The Bishop of Pinerolo, Mgr. Derio Olivero, himself affected by Covid, wrote in a pastoral letter last May: "I dream of Christians who do not consider themselves such because they go to Mass every Sunday (which is excellent), but Christians who know how to nourish their spirituality with moments of reflection on the Word, with moments of silence, moments of amazement in front of the beauty of the mountains or of a flower, moments of prayer in the family, a coffee offered with kindness. Not "devout" Christians (in an individualistic, private, abstract, ideological way), but believers who have faith in God in order to nourish their lives and to succeed in believing in life in good times and bad. [...] Not a Church that goes to church but a Church that goes to everyone. People who are charged with enthusiasm, with passion, hope and affection. Believers like this will regain the desire to go to church, to Mass, for nourishment. Otherwise, the nourishing food of the Eucharist will continue to be wasted. [...] Only with this hunger can we rediscover the good fortune of the Mass and only in this way will we rediscover the desire to become a gift for others, for the whole of human society."

It is from this perspective that the focus of this issue of *Ekklesia* is to explore three guiding objectives: the more than ever urgent need for parishes to see themselves as "going out", the valuing of the life of families as the domestic Church and, at least briefly, the presence of the laity as a leaven in society.

It is on all these fronts that we play out our being the people of God as we make our way through history, as "living stones" of the temple. Only as such can we vividly experience that the liturgy is a moment of encounter between Heaven and earth and that the sacraments graft us vividly into the Body of Christ. It will be useful, in this regard, to remember that for more than three centuries at the beginning of the Church, there were no sacred buildings and Christian communities grew and developed in homes, in the streets, in working life. It was precisely then that Christianity spread in an unstoppable way.

We are called to get moving again, to de-sacralize and de-clericize ourselves. Pope Francis' recent encyclical shows us the way: We are all Brothers! (*Tutti Fratelli*) We will discuss this in more depth in the next issue of *Ekklesia*, look at the impact of the encyclical *Laudato si'* over the past five years and examine the other initiatives that the Bishop of Rome is proposing to the Church and to humanity.