

My sister-in-law gave my husband a present. It is a rock with a cross carved into it. Because we as Christians know that the empty cross means that Christ rose, this gift very simply and elegantly symbolizes Christ as the living stone. Christ is the foundation stone of our faith community. Because we are followers of Christ, through the working of the Holy Spirit, we are shaped and formed into building stones that create a true community of saints to do Christ work in the world.

I'd like us to reflect a bit today on the formation process – the process of taking the raw material that is us – created in the image of God, but with the flaws that make us human – and making us a stone capable of holding its place in this community.

Geologically, rocks go through many stages in their formation depending upon their type. As you may remember from earth science, there are three major types of rocks – igneous, sedimentary and metamorphosis.

Igneous rocks are formed deep in the earth through melt – either melting of the rock that forms the solid earth underground or through lava, such as in a volcano. Then the lava or melted rock cools and becomes solid. This process requires intense heat and then cooling. It can happen quickly or over millions of years.

Sedimentary rocks are formed in layers as sediments, generally in the bottom of an ocean. They are buried

under other rocks and become rocks themselves. This type of formation requires a lot of pressure and almost always occurs over a long time. When you look carefully at a sedimentary rock, you can often see each of these layers and how it contributes to the whole character of the rock.

Metamorphosis rocks start out as either igneous or sedimentary. Then they are taken deep underground again and heated and remelted, becoming a new kind of rock. This process usually takes millions of years to occur in nature.

If we then are to become like living stones, strong enough upon which to build a community of saints, we then must undergo a process governed and guided by the Holy Spirit. That process of transformation may not be easy or quick. For example, we may, like the igneous rock, undertake a lot of heat either quietly (like underground) or visibly and violently in ways that others may see (like lava being forced out of a volcano.)

Or possibly, we may be formed as living stones in layers. Each experience in our life leaves particles of itself in our formation, building upon the other particle, until through some sort of pressure we become the stable rock we were meant to be.

Or perhaps, we were formed once before into a stable rock, either through taking the heat or through layers of

experience fusing together in our hearts after a certain pressure. But then something happens in our lives that throws us and causes us to lose our center. Maybe we even question our faith or our place in the community. Then we are put back into a re-formation process, where we through some type of heat are reformed and transformed into another rock – perhaps even more stable than the first – having many of the same elements as the first rock – but changed.

Formation and transformation takes time and requires that we be present to the Holy Spirit working during moments of heat and pressure in our lives. We become who we are in Christ through this formation process. Our formation as individuals into Christlike stones is important in its own right for our individual spirituality, but it's also important to create a solid community. Each of us is metaphorically, one stone in this local community of St Johns or St Andrews.

While Jesus is the chief cornerstone, we each are responsible for holding up our part of the community. Success of our faith community in making a difference in the world depends on each of the building stones remaining strong and contributing. Just as any builder would select his stones for a building project, God has selected each of us to be a building stone in this community. We are all part of this community because

God wanted us to be.

Each of us brings our personalities and our faith (which will be different for each of us depending upon how we have been formed and are still being formed) into the community. Because each of us was selected to be a stone here in this metaphorical building, the community needs all of us to stay strong together – to keep the foundation strong. We all have different gifts, just as stones have differences. We were formed differently and we appear differently. Some of us are still rough, others are smooth. Some have a bright luster of Christ that reflects onto the world, in others the light of Christ is less obvious. Just as some rocks in nature attract other rocks, some of us have magnetic personalities, while others are hidden gems. Some of us are close to being fully transformed into who we are in this community, others are still adding more layers; still others who thought they were formed are going back for reheating and another transformation. All of us are part of this spiritual house.

This spiritual house, in which each of us is a stone, has Jesus as its cornerstone. Jesus holds the walls of stones together and gives us strength. Jesus also binds us together and, through the Holy Spirit, is ever present as we are formed and are re-formed and transformed.

Through this living cornerstone we become a holy people performing God's holy work in the world.

Amen