

You have probably noticed that the Bible uses many images to help us understand the mystery of God. In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah used a beautiful image of a mother feeding her baby and says that just as a mother does not forget her baby at the breast, so God will not forget you. Jesus himself, in his preaching, used the image of a mustard seed to suggest that the kingdom of God begins like that tiny seed but grows into a huge tree.

In our readings today there were a couple of images. One was the image of a stone, the other the image of a building. In that world, among other things, stones were used to build houses and other important buildings. When builders came to build, they would have to choose stones that would fit together to make sure that the building was solid and would not collapse. Of course, they only wanted the best stones, and would judge many of the stones as being unsuitable and so would reject them.

Once we have that image in our mind, we can understand what St Peter was saying in our second reading. He applies the image of the stone to Jesus. But there is something baffling about this stone. First, it was rejected by the builders as being unsuitable. But obviously the master builder came by, looked at it and said he would use it. Not only would he use it, but it would be the keystone of the building. This was the stone against which the other stones rested so that the building would keep standing. The best way to imagine this is to think of an arch which is made up of angular stones one placed on the other as they curve towards the centre. The stone in the centre on which the others rest is the keystone. Pull this stone out and the whole building collapses.

We get the message, don't we? Jesus is the keystone. He is the stone rejected by the builders. He was rejected by those who refused to follow his way, who refused to listen to the truth of his message, and who refused to see the life that he gave through his miracles. These were the people who had the power to put him to death. He was rejected. But God has the last word and raised Jesus from the dead. God was like the master builder who chose the stone rejected by the builders, but it becomes the keystone. It is not just that Jesus was raised from the dead. He is also the keystone that keeps the Christian community together.

Jesus himself gives us this same message in the gospel reading when he says that he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. As the way, the truth and the life, he guides the Christian community, teaches it and keeps it together – all belonging to God’s household.

Now, there is something else we need to notice about the image of the stones. When St Peter tells us that the Lord is the living stone rejected by men but chosen by God, he goes on to say, “set yourselves close to him so that you may be living stones making a spiritual house”. If we think about it, this is a remarkable statement. Having said that the risen Lord is the living stone, it then says that we too – all of us – are living stones. This gives us a way to think about ourselves as Easter people. Even now, we are part of God’s building. Let’s stay with the image for a moment. It is saying that each of us is one of the stones that is necessary for the building to be God’s house. This tells us that we have great dignity but also a great responsibility. We share in the life of the risen Lord – the one who keeps the building standing. We each have our part to play for the sake of the building – for the sake of the community who are the followers of the risen Lord.

Of course, like any building, we can imagine that it needs to be cared for, lest it deteriorate and begin to fall apart. This is where it is important to remember his words that he is the way, the truth and the life. By keeping our eye on him and following his way we will be doing our part in the maintenance of the building. By listening to his word and putting it into practice, we will be doing our part in ensuring the integrity of the building. By receiving the life he gives, we will be doing our part to see that the building is always there to welcome the stranger and those who are seeking God, even if they can’t yet articulate their desire.

Yes, this is a great responsibility, but we are part of a building that has the risen Lord as the keystone. Let’s not forget Jesus’ words, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still and trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father’s house”.