

Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" Words to ponder, words to take to heart, a value to embrace, a sentiment to both remember and reflect upon.

These past few weeks we have reflected on the work we have given ourselves to do...work flowing from a vision and a need discerned over several years; many of us have studied and conversed, wondered how the needs could be met, agreed and disagreed, been convinced and unconvinced; excited and disappointed.

We have heard from leaders of our parish, reflecting on the hospitality, faith, sincerity and ministry we so vibrantly share, reminding us how valuable this house for the church is and how the space itself becomes the hospitality of Christ, a holy temple honoring the vision and action of loving service and genuine care.

We have both attended and been absent, conversing and silent, enthused and uninterested. Yet, still, here we are moving forward, recognizing what must be done and hoping that each of us and all of us will do the work, offer the gift, make the sacrifice, because we belong, believe and trust that in some manner, in some indescribable way, the Spirit teaches and cajoles us to remember that we all belong to Christ, neighbors all, gathered together for a sacred meal, nourished to honor, serve and provide.

What we are doing, and what we are about to do will change, or better, transform us; fill us more surely with a deeper sense of belonging, caring, serving and praying. It will test us and affirm us; challenge us and bring us great peace; it will strengthen faith, renew us in hope, test our love and invite us even more deeply to offer a genuine sacrifice of praise. The renovation of a worship space will "renovate" and rebuild us, make us new, and restore our spirit as "the holy temple of God," which we are.

The Bishops of the United States, when they write in their document on Church renovation and building, called BUILT OF LIVING STONES, describe the work we have been doing and the vision we hope to accomplish in this way:

"A characteristic of Christians is how they love one another even while they meet the challenge of renovating a place of worship. It may be difficult and the fabric of the assembly may fray and tear. But the Spirit's work in the assembly of God's People encourages cooperation so that each can perform a task for building up the Body of Christ. During a building process, the community works together with the diocese and the universal Church as another way of building up the Church with the "living stones" from which God's assembly is made. If the community looks upon its work with the eyes of faith, then it can be assured that God will bring the good work to completion." The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture, and Worship (2000).

We do look upon this work with the eyes of faith. We do hear and affirm God's word spoken to Moses and most assuredly to us: "Speak to whole community and tell them: *"Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy."* *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord."*

We do look upon this work with the eyes of faith when we sing: *"The Lord is kind and merciful."* We do look upon this work with the eyes of faith when we remember that we are the temple of God and that God's spirit dwells in us; We look upon this work with the eyes of faith when we pray, as we did when we began, that we long to be fashioned by God's grace to become a dwelling pleasing to God.



With such faith and vision, the work we do during the coming Lenten days, the sacrifice we will make, the gifts we will offer, will be a witness to the great deeds God has done and is still doing. With such vision and depth, with such spirit and love, can the environment we hope to create be anything less than a vehicle to meet the Lord and to encounter one another? Is not that vision worth the effort and the sacrifice to be made? Is

not this challenge the final challenge of Christ himself: *"You must make ready until I return again in glory."*

So for the coming forty days of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, do the work, enter the vision; offer the gift: HONOR THE PAST, SERVE THE PRESENT, PROVIDE FOR THE FUTURE.

