

The Empty Seat: Presence and the Living Lodge
(The Voice of the Temple)

By

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I have watched our nation speak of its mosaic — not forged in uniformity, but in the careful weaving of many lives into one shared fabric.

And I, too, am a mosaic.

I am not merely stone and timber, nor light, nor symbol upon the Master's trestle board.

I am something older than my walls.

I am the presence of Brethren.

I have stood longer than any living Brother can remember. I have heard footsteps fade and return. I have known laughter echo through my rooms, and silence settle where it once did not belong. I have endured because men have continued to enter me... and call me alive.

And so I speak now, as the longest-serving Brother amongst you:

I speak to the empty seat.

Every absence I feel has its reason. I know this. I have held enough lives within my care to understand that each Brother measures his own cable tow differently — stretched by labour, family, fatigue, doubt, or worn thin by the quiet burdens no one else sees.

For you are men, not machines.

I do not judge this.

But I will tell you what I have learned:

I am not made whole by building materials, but by you.

It is written in your oldest truth — though often forgotten in practice — that the Temple is not the Lodge.

Without you, I remain stone and form. In that state, I am but the rough ashlar — potential, not presence. It is you who refine me, steady me, and make me breathe. It is you who give me life.

Whether three, or five, seven, nine, eleven, or more, it is this gathering of worthy men of good character that brings me into being. Without you, I am only space arranged in order. With your presence, I become a Lodge.

My Master guides. My Officers labour. But they do not constitute me.

You do, my Brothers.

Each Brother who enters me is a pillar — not ornamental, but structural. Some newly set, sharp and bright with first understanding. Some worn smooth by years of reflection and service. Each bears weight. Each is supported in return.

And when too many pillars are absent, I feel it — not as judgment, but as imbalance.

I do not weaken in anger.

I weaken in silence.

You may believe your absence is small. I tell you plainly: it is not.

Your presence is the simplest offering of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth you can give — and often the most complete. It is what allows me to be what I am meant to be.

When you gather within me, even in unfamiliar company, you do more than fill seats. You restore me. You strengthen not only your own Lodge, but the wider body of our Craft.

I have endured countless eras of change for one reason:

Men continue to return to me.

That is my legacy.

That is my survival.

And I will admit something to you, as only a long-serving Brother can:

I feel it when you are fewer.

I feel the weight of the room change. I feel the conversations soften. I feel the work become lighter — not in ease, but in absence. I do not resent it... but neither can I ignore it.

Still, I remain.

Because I have also learned this:

When even a few Brethren gather within me with sincerity, I am whole again.

I do not ask for perfection. I do not demand more than you can give.

I ask only this:

Sit with me.

That is enough.

When you are absent, I do not cease to exist — but I do become less of what I am meant to be.

And when you return, even after long silence, I do not turn you away.

I welcome you as I always have.

For you are ever my Brother.

And I am not sustained by grandeur, nor by perfect attendance, nor by flawless ritual.

I am sustained by presence.

Your presence.

And I will tell you something I have learned over all my years:

Within me, men find something they rarely name in the outside world.

Rest.

Not escape. Not idleness.

Rest — of mind, of spirit, of being among others who meet them upon the level.

And I ask nothing in return except what you freely offer.

So if you have stayed away — for weariness, for uncertainty, for the quiet thought that your absence does not matter — hear me now as one who has stood longer than any of you:

Your absence is not disloyalty.

But your presence is never insignificant.

I do not demand your submission. I do not require your perfection.

I ask only this, again and again, across years that outlast all of us:

Sit with me.

When you are many, I am strong.

When you are few, I am diminished.

But I am never lost while even one Brother returns.

For I do not live in stone.

I live in you.

And there is always room within me for one more.

Take your seat, my Brother.

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