

DEDICATION OF JOHN LATERAN

As I stated at the beginning of the Mass, today's feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome celebrates the unity of the Church under the leadership of the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, as well as the fact that we are called to be the "living stones" that make up God's building, the Body of Christ. And the cornerstone of this building is Jesus himself.

One of the themes in the Scriptures for this feast is the **holiness** of God's temple. St. Paul reminds us that we are God's temple and the Holy Spirit dwells within us. We must keep ourselves - through God's grace - holy and pure. Just as a church building is dedicated to set it apart as the house of God, so we must be dedicated to the service of God.

When a church is dedicated, it is sprinkled with holy water, the walls and the altar are anointed with Chrism, the altar is then dressed in white, and lit candles are placed around it. The dedication of the church is completed by the celebration of the Eucharist. The same things are done to us when we are baptized, and when the Sacraments of Initiation are completed in First Communion and Confirmation.

The Gospel account of the cleansing of the Temple reminds us of this call to whole-hearted dedication. Just as the merchants and money-changers had turned the Temple in Jerusalem into a "marketplace," so there is the temptation for us to become more devoted to the values and mentality of the marketplace than we are to the values of the Gospel and the mind of Christ.

The role of the Bishop of Rome is to call the Church - as an institution and as individual members - back to our vocation as the Body of Christ. And as the Body of Christ, Pope Francis has been challenging all of us to not be confined inside the walls of a church building, but to go out and reach out to those who need the presence of Jesus Christ in their lives.

In the second reading, St. Paul writes, "If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person, for the temple of God, which you are, is holy." The universal call to holiness was one of the central themes of the Second Vatican Council, and St. Paul, as well as Jesus in the Gospel, is reminding us that we will be judged according to our response to this universal call to holiness.

Through our prayer, sacrifices, and good works we are called to deepen our relationship with Jesus. Through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the worthy reception of Holy Communion we ask the Lord to "cleanse" our temple and nourish us for the service of God and our neighbor.

Finally, this feast of the dedication of the "Mother of all churches" should inspire us to keep this church building holy, set apart as the house of God. Our reverence in church is a sign of our reverence for the presence of God, especially for the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. In the celebration of the Holy Mass, heaven touches earth, and we are lifted up into the heavenly liturgy.

This makes a church a unique place of encounter with God, even as we recognize our responsibility to be respectful and welcoming of each other. Everything that happens in this church building should be "built upon" the foundation which is Christ. Everything we do here should flow from Jesus and his Gospel "blueprint" for our behavior, and our experience here should form us as we are sent forth to be sacraments of Christ's presence in our world.