

From The Pastor

Today's feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome is normative to November 9, yet like the feast of All Souls last Sunday, it takes the place of the 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time. The feast holds importance not because of the brick and mortar that is the structure of a particular church building, but what the Church represents and calls forth from its people.

The feast originates in the year 324 when the Emperor Constantine gave the great Lateran palace and its surrounding grounds to the Church of Rome. Later, in the tenth century this same Basilica was dedicated to St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist, and came to be known as the Lateran Basilica. Still later in history, Pope Clement XII (1730-1740) inscribed the church as the 'Mother and Head of all churches of the City and the world'.

Rome is the seat of Christianity, and the head of the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world. All dioceses have a Cathedral or 'Mother' church as its center of faith representing the unity of all believers in the diocese. Here in Detroit, we have Blessed Sacrament Cathedral. The bishop of the diocese generally lives in this church and runs the diocese from this locale.

The Pope is the universal pastor or Vicar of Christ for the whole Church. He is also the bishop of the local diocese of Rome. The Lateran Basilica represents the universal seat or center of authority for the universal Church.

More importantly, this feast represents the unity we are as the People of God and the faith we profess in Jesus Christ who is the cornerstone and foundation of all that we are. The feast represents and celebrates the unity we are as a People of God and the role we play as co-creators with God in the world.

Each of the readings today flesh out this theme. An essential mission of the Church is to baptize and call the faithful to the abundance of divine life. The first reading from the Prophet Ezekiel presents an image of baptism and the abundance that comes from a life of faith in God. The water flowing from the temple is the water of baptism that makes all things fruitful and abundant in every season. It flows into the sea and makes the salt water fresh. These are images of all that is possible, and all that God desires, for those who seek Him. Such a work is not our doing, but God's plan and design for us.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul makes the image of Christ and the Church living and dynamic. In this translation it says, 'you are God's building'; another translation says, 'you are God's farm'. A farm is a living and organic system that works together to produce good fruit. A farm is symbiotic. All parts must work together in unity to produce the desired fruit. No part works singularly by itself apart from the whole.

Christ is the center and foundation of the building or farm that is the Church. We are not the architects; we are the workers who cooperate with the Lord to accomplish his purpose for us. More than workers, we share the identity and dignity of the architect, the Creator who calls us to himself.

'Do you not know that you are the Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?' We are indeed God's building. Each of us is the house and dwelling place of God by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us through baptism. What does that mean to you personally? You are a dwelling place of God. God chooses, seeks, and desires to dwell in you. You are holy because of the divine life that dwells within you. It is the source of your life, your call and identity in love, your purpose and your happiness in this world. God reverences and honors you with his presence, calling you to love and reverence yourself with dignity and honor.

Our holiness, the Holy Spirit living within us, is our power and light in the midst of the darkness and confusion so evident in the world. You not only matter, you are essential to the fulfillment of God's plan for the world. Claim your holiness as a temple of God. Be light in the midst of the darkness and confusion of sin. Do not do nothing. Do not be a light hidden under a bushel basket. Hidden light leaves many others in darkness. As Winston Churchill once remarked, 'for evil to triumph, good people must simply do nothing. Doing nothing is a temple that has lost its inner light.'

In the gospel, Jesus clears the Temple. Zeal for the divine way fills the spirit of Jesus and he acts. Jesus does not clear the temple because he is a neat freak who wants clean floors. Jesus himself is soon to become the new Temple of God's way. Jesus clears the animals from the Temple that were used for sacrifice because he himself will become the sacrifice offered to God for our salvation. The old sacrifice is obsolete, and no longer effective. Jesus is the Temple of God destroyed on the Cross, only to be raised up in three days. He is now the light that fills the Temple, and who dwells in the hearts of all who believe.

The Dedication of the Lateran Basilica represents our dedication to God through the grace of baptism. We are the People of God, and we have the great responsibility and the privilege to be God's light to the world.

Father John Esper