

Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome Lectionary: 671

Reading 1 - [Ezekiel 47:1-2, 8-9, 12](#)

The angel brought me back to the entrance of the temple, and I saw water flowing out from beneath the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the façade of the temple was toward the east; the water flowed down from the southern side of the temple, south of the altar. He led me outside by the north gate, and around to the outer gate facing the east, where I saw water trickling from the southern side. He said to me, "This water flows into the eastern district down upon the Arabah, and empties into the sea, the salt waters, which it makes fresh. Wherever the river flows, every sort of living creature that can multiply shall live, and there shall be abundant fish, for wherever this water comes the sea shall be made fresh. Along both banks of the river, fruit trees of every kind shall grow; their leaves shall not fade, nor their fruit fail. Every month they shall bear fresh fruit, for they shall be watered by the flow from the sanctuary. Their fruit shall serve for food, and their leaves for medicine."

Responsorial Psalm - [Psalm 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9](#) R. (5) The waters of the river gladden the city of God, the holy dwelling of the Most High!

Reading 2 - [1 Corinthians 3:9c-11, 16-17](#)

Brothers and sisters: You are God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But each one must be careful how he builds upon it, for no one can lay a foundation other than the one that is there, namely, Jesus Christ.

Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for the temple of God, which you are, is holy.

Gospel - [John 2:13-22](#)

Since the Passover of the Jews was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as the money-changers seated there. He made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables, and to those who sold doves he said, "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace." His disciples recalled the words of Scripture, Zeal for your house will consume me. At this the Jews answered and said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his Body. Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they came to believe the Scripture and the word Jesus had spoken.

Today's liturgical memorial celebrates the dedication of the Basilica of St John Lateran, in Rome, which is the oldest Christian Church building in the world and the Mother Church for Catholics throughout the world. Dedicated in 324 AD by Pope Sylvester I, almost 300 years after Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, it is the seat of the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, first among equals.

Why did it take so long for the early Christians to build a church: persecution. During those three hundred years, Christianity suffered continuous waves of violent persecution because the disciples of Christ refused to worship the pagan gods of the Roman Empire. The emperors believed that the stability of the Empire depended upon worshipping their pagan gods, so refusing to worship them constituted the crime of treason. As a result, throughout the empire Christians were arrested, imprisoned, interrogated, and tortured. Understandably it was impossible to build permanent, public places of worship. They used private homes instead, just as many Christians are doing today in China. The situation changed only when Constantine, the son of St Helen, became emperor in 312 AD. With Constantine, Christianity was legalized, and that particular age of persecution came to a close.

God works through us. We are the Church. This celebration is a celebration of who we are, what it means to be church. And so, this first church built in the new era of Christianity stands as a tangible symbol of the heroic virtue of the martyrs and the grace of God that sustained them, that enabled this tiny, poor, non-military religion of Christianity to conquer the great Roman Empire. Although it has great significance, we're not just celebrating the building itself. It's the people of God, the members of the mystical body of Christ that we celebrate.

The readings for this Mass, they all focus on temples, the various forms of temples that lead up to and ultimately through Christ - because of our baptism - to ourselves as temples of the Holy Spirit, ourselves as tabernacles, as we receive the Lord into ourselves through the Eucharist, which is meant to make us holy, sacred, set apart. If you were here last week, you heard me preach that the personal mortal sins of the members of the Body of Christ affect the whole mystical body like cancerous cell in the human body.

We are all called to recognize our holiness for the sake of our own salvation. and for the sake of the world. So that as we are sent from the Eucharistic Celebration into the world, we do so as living reflections of the prophetic image of the lifegiving waters flowing from the side of the temple, just as the lifegiving waters flowed from the side of Christ on the cross, representing our baptism, our return to purity. We become the flowing waters from the temple, the building out into the world to bring life into the world to bring the truth of God into the world to transform the world literally into the perfect human environment. The perfect environment for human thriving. That's our mission. That's the salvation, the good news we bring into the world. That's why we share our faith, to lead others into the recognition of themselves as incredible creatures of God.

Our mission as disciples is to help others recognize in themselves the incredible dignity of the human person that supposedly we ourselves understand so much that we humbly go to God knowing our need. We beseech God for the graces that which are given through the church, through the church's teachings, to become what it is we were made to be to become as the church fathers said, the Eucharist which we receive is to transform us and cause our growth in holiness, growth in eagerness to increasingly seek the holiness for which God made us.

But we can't share about the universal call to holiness, without credibility. When you tell your friend Joe that he too is called to holiness. Joe will look at you and ask, what are you talking about? Well, then you've got to tell him what you're talking about. So, you say, as awkward as it may seem, "Joe, you have dignity and value." And Joe says, "I know. I'm awesome. Thanks for seeing it. You're such an affirming best buddy."

Yeah. No guy ever said that. You must explain what you mean. That he has dignity and value because of who created him, because of what God created him for. How are you going to help him to know what is going to build him up and what is going to tear him down as a human being? How are you going to help him to know what it is to live authentic life? Especially if Joe knows you ain't doing it. If he and others know that you talk a good talk, but when it comes to walking the walk, not so much. Our witness, our sharing, our testimony needs to be authentic. Yes, we're on a journey and we can say to someone who calls us out, knows we're Catholic, knows we're Christian, and says, "Um, don't you guys believe such and such?" And you're like, "Um, yeah. People know what we believe. People know when we're not credible. But this is also an opportunity for honesty, you can say it's true. You're right. I need to do better with that. You're right. I should not do this, that, or the other thing. You're right. I should be more attentive to those people. You're right. I should not judge those people. You're right. etc., etc., etc. To admit the fault, to admit that we're not yet what we believe we're called to be. But to be able to say with credibility to Joe, I'm working on it. And I'm here to tell you, it isn't possible to be what's become a cultural cliché, the best version of yourself without God without the graces that God offers without the recognition that I need God because the best version of myself, although it may include excellence in this that and the other thing, it is first and fundamentally about excellence as a human person. And what does that mean? Who am I allowing to define for me what it means for the human person to be excellent? But who is it that gives us the perfect example, the perfect model? Everybody said.... Jesus.

Jesus is the model. Jesus shows us not only the way, but he reveals the Father to us and all that comes from the Father. He reveals the authentic human person to us. If we focus on him, we will see that which we ought to become. To the degree that we focus on him and the teachings that come from him, especially itemized in the several of letters of St. Paul. He is an excellent example of a mission driven evangelizing disciple who was whole heartedly sharing the good news, telling people about Christ, and then once they were Christians telling them how this is lived because you don't just keep on doing the same thing... it's about transformation and it ought to be exciting, it ought to be thrilling, it ought to be an adventure, and an adventure like climbing a mountain that isn't a walk in the garden. Climbing a mountain means you've got to exercise. Climbing a mountain might mean you slip back a little bit. It might mean that there's suffering involved. There is sweat. But if you're going to ascend to the peak of the mountain, then it's going to take everything you have and then it's going to take the supernatural power of God working in you to ascend that mountain of human excellence to which we're called while at the same time inviting others to it.

Just like anything that you are excited about, that moves you, that you're passionate about, you want to tell other people about that. You want to draw other people into that. Pickle ball didn't get so exciting for people and so popular in such a short time because people kept it a secret. I remember when I first heard about pickle ball, I was like, "What? Pickle ball? What is that?" Now they're playing it all over the world. They're building pickle ball courts. People are making money. Next thing you know, it's going to be an Olympic sport. The point being, we invite people into these things. I'm excited about this team. Come and watch with me.

And, it's got to be about Jesus, transformative relationship with God. If we think it's all about the church and the rules, the Holy Spirit will not be able to stoke the fire of faith in us or others. Yeah, somebody wrote down some really great things because people ask questions. Well, can I still do this? Actually, no. Somebody wrote that down and it became a rule because it made sense. It was the truth. But you don't need to ever read the Bible. You don't need to be a theologian. You don't need seminary. You don't need nothing but the revelation of God to know these truths and live them because love teaches it. Love breaks it open within you. The scriptures that God written in the very depths of your being, the Holy Spirit that is in you because of your baptism and confirmation. That Holy Spirit leading, guiding into all truth. That Holy Spirit that helps you to speak the truth and share and grow amid incredible challenges in the world.

People like to say this is the most challenging time in history. But I'll bet you there's few among us who could have lived in the times, you know, when they built this church, who could have lived through that persecution without buckling to the demands of the emperors. It's like, wait a minute. So, if I don't worship the god of the moment, you're going to skin me alive, boil me in tar, set me on fire, stretch out my members so they break. You're going to scourge me. Okay, where do I sign? I'm all for it. because I don't want the pain. There is no period that was worse than another. It's always hard because we are always inclined to sin and we are always trying to have our cake and eat it too.

The church is nothing without our pursuit of holiness. It is just a building in a community with rules and box checking, a little cash in a bag to help keep the lights on. It won't change anything if we don't change. If we don't recognize what it means to be a human being, if we don't live what it is we say we believe in the creed. And if we aren't willing to pay the price that those folks, especially in the first 300 years, and those folks around the world who continue to suffer martyrdom for the faith, the martyrdom of their lives and the martyrdom of losing friends, losing jobs, losing opportunities, the sacrifices we make for the love of God in return for his love for us. This mutual relationship of love that sets the standard for every other relationship we have.

So today we celebrate all of that by focusing on St. John Latheran and all that it represents. I think finally what I would say is, well what I want to say is, let's be what God made us to be... sacred, to live knowing how sacred we are personally, all together, and every single human being that ever was, is, or will be created... sacred. Just imagine if in every decision and in every encounter and in every glance at another person, if my first thought was sacredness, how that would, in and of itself, change my behavior. Imagine. Imagine what the world would be like if even in our brokenness, we were not striving for that. If we just gave it all up, what would happen to the world we live in? Talk about a free-for-all. Social contracts never last. Love does.

The best-selling single of John Lennon's solo career was 'Imagine'. The lyrics encourage listeners to imagine a world of peace, without materialism, without borders separating nations and without religion. Well, what John Lennon didn't know then he definitely knows now... you can imagine that world all you like, but you can't live in a world like that without everyone believing in God and living their faith. To promise or teach otherwise, is a crime against humanity.

Executive Summary

This briefing synthesizes the core themes surrounding the Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica. The central argument posits that this liturgical celebration is not merely about a historic building, but is a profound reflection on the identity of the Church as the "people of God" and the "mystical body of Christ." This understanding grounds the universal call to holiness, which is presented as the primary mission for believers. This mission involves recognizing one's own sacredness and evangelizing others by sharing the "good news" of human dignity rooted in divine creation. Effective evangelization demands authentic, credible witness; believers are called to acknowledge their imperfections while striving for "human excellence" modeled on Jesus Christ. The spiritual journey is characterized not as a simple adherence to rules but as an arduous, transformative adventure—akin to climbing a mountain—that requires total commitment and divine grace. The analysis concludes by contrasting this faith-based vision with secular ideals, asserting that a truly peaceful world is impossible without widespread belief in and adherence to God's love.

1. Historical and Symbolic Significance of the Lateran Basilica

The celebration focuses on the dedication of the Basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome, which holds a unique position in Christianity.

- **Primacy and Age:** It is identified as the "Mother Church for Catholics throughout the world" and the oldest Christian church building, dedicated in 324 AD by Pope Sylvester I. It serves as the official seat of the Pope, the Bishop of Rome.
- **Context of Construction:** The basilica's construction was made possible only after Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in 312 AD, ending nearly three centuries of violent Roman persecution.
 - **Roman Persecution:** For 300 years, Christians were persecuted for refusing to worship the pagan gods of the Roman Empire, an act considered treason. The emperors believed the stability of the Empire depended on this worship.
 - **Forms of Persecution:** Christians were subjected to arrest, imprisonment, interrogation, and extreme torture, including being skinned alive, boiled in tar, set on fire, and scourged.
 - **Early Worship:** During this period, it was impossible to build public places of worship, so Christians gathered in private homes.
- **Symbolism:** The basilica stands as a "tangible symbol of the heroic virtue of the martyrs and the grace of God that sustained them." It represents the triumph of a "tiny, poor, non-military religion" over the Roman Empire. The building itself has been rebuilt over time due to wars, earthquakes, and fires, reinforcing that the celebration's focus is on the people, not the physical structure.

2. The Identity of the Church: From Building to People

A core theme is the distinction between the physical church and the spiritual reality it represents. The celebration is fundamentally about "who we are, what it means to be church."

- **The Mystical Body of Christ:** The Church is defined not as an institution or building, but as "the people of God, the members of the mystical body of Christ."
- **Individuals as Temples:** Through baptism and the Eucharist, believers themselves become "temples of the Holy Spirit" and "tabernacles." The readings for the Mass are noted to focus on the progression of temples, culminating in the individual believer.
- **The Eucharist's Purpose:** Receiving the Eucharist is "meant to make us holy, sacred, set apart." It is intended to transform believers and cause growth in holiness. As the Church Fathers said, believers are to become "that which we receive."
- **The Effect of Sin:** Personal mortal sin is described as a "cancerous cell" within the human body, affecting the entire mystical body of Christ. This underscores the interconnectedness of believers and the importance of individual holiness for the health of the whole.

3. The Universal Mission: Holiness and World Transformation

The understanding of the Church's identity directly leads to a mission of holiness and evangelization for every believer.

- **The Dual Purpose of Holiness:** Believers are called to recognize their holiness for two primary reasons: "for the sake of our own salvation and for the sake of the world."
- **The Prophetic Image:** Christians are called to be "living reflections of the prophetic image of the life-giving waters flowing from the side of the temple." This is a direct parallel to the water that flowed from Christ's side on the cross, representing baptism and a return to purity.
- **Mission to the World:** The mission is to act as these "flowing waters," bringing God's life and truth into the world. The ultimate goal is to "transform the world literally into the perfect human environment... the perfect environment for human thriving."
- **The "Good News":** The salvation and "good news" brought to the world is the recognition of the "incredible dignity of the human person" as a creature made by God for love and holiness.

4. The Mandate for Authentic Evangelization

Sharing the faith requires more than words; it demands a credible and authentic life, even in the face of personal failings.

- **The Challenge of Credibility:** A hypothetical conversation with "Joe" illustrates the difficulty of sharing the call to holiness. If the evangelizer's life does not align with their message ("You talk a good talk, but when it comes to walking the walk, not so much"), the message loses its power. "Our witness, our sharing, our testimony needs to be authentic."
- **Responding to Hypocrisy:** When confronted with personal failings, the proper response is honesty and humility. One should admit the fault ("You're right. I need to do better with that.") and affirm the journey toward holiness ("I'm working on it.").
- **The Core Message:** The key message for "Joe" is that becoming the "best version of yourself"—a cultural cliché—is impossible "without God, without the graces that God offers." True excellence is excellence as a human person, defined by God, not by secular culture.
- **The Power of Passion:** Evangelization should be as natural as sharing any other passion. The analogy of pickleball's rapid growth is used: "Pickle ball didn't get so exciting for people and so popular in such a short time because people kept it a secret." People naturally invite others into things they are excited about.

5. The Spiritual Journey and the Model of Excellence

The path to holiness is presented as an arduous but thrilling adventure, with a clear model for guidance.

- **Jesus as the Model:** Jesus is the ultimate model for human excellence. He "reveals the authentic human person to us," and focusing on him and his teachings shows believers what they "ought to become." St. Paul is also cited as an "excellent example of a mission driven evangelizing disciple."
- **The Mountain Climbing Analogy:** The spiritual life is not a "walk in the garden" but an "adventure like climbing a mountain." This journey involves:
 - **Effort:** "You've got to exercise."
 - **Setbacks:** "You might slip back a little bit."
 - **Struggle:** "There's suffering involved. There is sweat."
 - **Dependence on Grace:** Ascending the "mountain of human excellence" requires everything a person has, plus "the supernatural power of God working in you."
- **Love Over Rules:** The journey is ultimately about a "transformative relationship with God," not merely checking boxes or following rules. While rules exist because they codify truth, the fundamental teacher is love. "You don't need to ever read the Bible... You don't need nothing but the revelation of God to know these truths and live them because love teaches it."

6. Call to Action and Critique of Secular Ideals

The homily concludes with a powerful call to embrace sacredness and a sharp critique of secular utopian visions.

- **The Cost of Discipleship:** The Church becomes meaningless—"just a building in a community with rules and box checking"—if its members do not pursue holiness and are unwilling to "pay the price." This price includes sacrifices like those of the early martyrs and modern "martyrdom of losing friends, losing jobs, losing opportunities."
- **The Power of "Sacredness":** A final call to action is to "be what God made us to be... sacred." The speaker proposes an imaginative exercise: "Just imagine if in every decision and in every encounter and in every glance at another person, if my first thought was sacredness, how that would, in and of itself, change my behavior."
- **Critique of John Lennon's 'Imagine':** The song's vision of a world with no religion, materialism, or borders is directly challenged. The speaker contends that such a peaceful world is impossible without universal belief in God and the practice of faith. "Social contracts never last. Love does." To teach that peace is possible without God is labeled a "crime against humanity."

Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition (as derived from the source context)
Basilica of St. John Lateran	The oldest Christian Church building in the world, dedicated in 324 AD. It is the Mother Church for Catholics and the seat of the Pope, the Bishop of Rome.
Church	Understood in multiple ways: a physical building (like the Lateran Basilica); the people of God; and the Mystical Body of Christ. The celebration of the basilica is ultimately a celebration of the people.
Constantine	The Roman emperor who, in 312 AD, legalized Christianity. This act brought an end to the era of major persecutions against Christians.
Credibility	The quality of being authentic in one's faith, where actions align with beliefs. It is presented as essential for effectively sharing the faith with others.
Dignity (of the human person)	The inherent value and worth that every human possesses because they were created by God and for God. A core part of the Christian mission is to help others recognize this dignity in themselves.
Eucharist	The sacrament through which believers receive the Lord into themselves. It is meant to make them holy, sacred, and set apart, transforming them into what they receive.
Holiness	A state of being sacred and set apart for God. The source emphasizes the "universal call to holiness" as a primary mission for all believers, necessary for their own salvation and for the transformation of the world.
Holy Spirit	The presence of God residing within baptized and confirmed believers. The Holy Spirit leads, guides into all truth, and helps believers to speak and share their faith.
Jesus	The perfect example and model of an excellent, authentic human person. He reveals the Father and shows believers the way they ought to live and what they ought to become.
Martyrdom	The suffering and death endured for one's faith. The text also expands this to include modern sacrifices, such as losing friends, jobs, or opportunities for the love of God.
Mystical Body of Christ	A term for the Church, emphasizing the collective unity of all believers as one body with Christ as the head. Personal sin affects the entire body.
Persecution	The violent and continuous oppression faced by early Christians for approximately 300 years. The Roman Empire considered their refusal to worship pagan gods to be treason.
Sacred	The state of being holy and worthy of reverence. The source posits that every human being is sacred and that recognizing this "sacredness" in every encounter would fundamentally change behavior and the world.
Tabernacle	A term used to describe believers after they receive the Eucharist. Just as a physical tabernacle holds the presence of Christ, believers become vessels of Christ.
Temple	A sacred space. The concept evolves from the physical temple in Jerusalem, to the body of Christ, and finally to individual believers who become "temples of the Holy Spirit" through Baptism.
Transformation	The process of change and growth in holiness that is central to the Christian life. It is described as an exciting, challenging adventure, not merely adhering to a set of rules.