

The Dedication of the Lateran Basilica

John 2:13-22

13 Just before the Jewish Passover Jesus went up to Jerusalem, 14 and in the Temple he found people selling cattle and sheep and pigeons, and the money changers sitting at their counters there. 15 Making a whip out of some cord, he drove them all out of the Temple, cattle and sheep as well, scattered the money changers' coins, knocked their tables over 16 and said to the pigeon-sellers, 'Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market.' 17 Then his disciples remembered the words of scripture: Zeal for your house will devour me. 18 The Jews intervened and said, 'What sign can you show us to justify what you have done?' 19 Jesus answered, 'Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up.' 20 The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this sanctuary: are you going to raise it up in three days?' 21 But he was speaking of the sanctuary that was his body, 22 and when Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the words he had said.

Other readings: Ezekiel 47:1-2,8-9,12 Psalm 45 (46) 1 Corinthians 3:9-11,16-17

It may come as a surprise that the celebration of the dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome displaces the usual Sunday celebration. There are two reasons for this: the basilica's primary dedication is to the Saviour, and, being the cathedral of Rome, it is the mother church of the Christian world and takes precedence even over St Peter's in the Vatican.

The basilica of 'St John Lateran', as it is also called, since it is dedicated also to St John the Baptist, was built in the fourth century by the Roman emperor Constantine. It became the church of the bishop of Rome. For many centuries the popes lived at the Lateran. Close by is the baptistry where Constantine was baptised.

Our gospel reading teaches us that Christ is the new temple. He is God among us. While the prophet Ezekiel sees the temple in Jerusalem as the place of the presence of God, from which blessings flow out to renew and revive creation, Jesus is the new temple from whom new life comes in abundance.

But it is not a building of stones that we celebrate today. We celebrate the presence of Christ among us, his people, in his church. St Paul tells us that we ourselves are God's building, God's temple: 'Did you not realise that you were God's temple and that the Spirit of God was living among you?' The feast of this ancient basilica reminds us that we are 'living stones' and that we belong together in Christ's church.

Do I remember that I too am a temple of God, for the Holy Spirit has been given to me?

Do I value my membership of the Church, the new people of God in the world of today?

Let us thank God for the faith of those who have gone before us.

Let us pray for new Christians that they may grow in the faith.