**Feast of the Dedication of St. John Lateran**

November 8/9, 2014

Ez 47: 1-2, 8-9, 12; 1 Cor 3: 9c-11, 16-17; John 2: 13-22

We celebrate today the feast of the Dedication of Arch-basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome. St. John Lateran is the Pope’s cathedral because it is the cathedral of the Diocese of Rome.

St. John Lateran is the oldest existing Christian church in the world. The land on which it is built was given to the Church in 313 by Emperor Constantine, the first emperor of Rome to become Christian. The pope of the time build a basilica on that site, the mosaics of the main sanctuary arch are said to have been preserved from the barbarians when they invaded and destroyed Rome in the 400s, mosaics you can still marvel at in today’s basilica. The original basilica was ransacked by the Vandals and restored by Pope St. Gregory the Great in 460. This basilica was completely destroyed by an earthquake in 896, built again only to be destroyed by fire, rebuilt and destroyed once again by fire. Finally, the present basilica was built in 1360 by Pope Urban V. If you go to St. John Lateran, you can see wood from the table that St. Peter used to say Mass, and elsewhere a cedar table which tradition says was the table used by Jesus at the Last Supper.

Yes, while we celebrate the dedication of a particular church in Rome, the pope’s cathedral, we are reminded in our readings today that we in truth are celebrating something far more important. Church buildings, as we know if we look at the history of St. John Lateran, are often destroyed and rebuilt. What Jesus tells us there is a truer temple for which he burned with zeal. Our reading tells us that this temple becomes for us a source, a reason for faith, for belief in the words Jesus has spoken. What temple was Jesus referring to?

This temple is his body that would be killed and he would raise up in three days and become the source of faith for us! This temple is his ***body and blood, his soul and his divinity***, i.e., the Eucharist. This temple is his ***mystical body*** the Church on earth and in heaven. This temple is the ***“Father’s house”*** the dwelling place of God! This temple is a ***source of life*** for all. This temple ***bears fruit***, good fruit, for all to eat. This temple is ***medicine*** for body and soul we are told. This temple is a ***source of life-giving water***.

This temple is the Body of Christ. We too are this temple because God lives in each of us!

The Spirit of God dwells in us. If we believe that God lives within us, that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, dwelling places of the Father, then we have a lot of questions to answer.

How can we **destroy one another** by words or deeds if God lives in us? How can we **wage war** against each other if God lives in us? How can we **kill the innocent, destroy the unborn or neglect the elderly** if we believe that God lives in us? How can we play God and **take the lives of** **criminals** if we believe God dwells in us? How can we **deprive the poor** of what is necessary for a dignified life if we believe God lives in us? How can we **deny medical care** to the aged? How can we abuse our **spouses or our children**? How can we **reject the immigrant** or the alien in our midst, if we believe what Jesus has taught which is that God lives in us?

Jesus tells us that the human person is sacred. The human body and soul are holy, for they are true temples of God, dedicated to him.

We must be careful for as we heard in our readings, “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person, for the temple of God, which you are, is holy.”

I don’t think it is possible to walk into a beautiful church building, whether St. John Lateran or any other church, and enter it with real recognition of God’s presence, if we do not believe that the human person is sacred, a temple of the Father.

I don’t think we can fully worship God at Mass, or pray reverently to him in private, if we are violent to ourselves or others. I don’t think we really accept the Real Presence of Jesus, his body and blood, soul and divinity, in the Eucharist if we do not recognize his living presence in the human person.

John Henry Newman, the famous English bishop in the 1800s, wrote an article entitled, “The Venture of Faith”. Newman posed the question: “What have we ventured for the faith?” In other words, what have we risked, put on the line, because we claim to believe what Jesus Christ taught?

Yes, it is easy to enjoy the beautiful words of Jesus, the general encouragements to love God and neighbor. What happens though when we are challenged to apply those words to real life? Don’t we often cringe? If a preacher challenges us, don’t we often think, “He’s going too far!” and we pull back, we risk less, venture less even though we claim to believe?   
  
Newman challenges us to put into practice the teachings of Jesus, and today Jesus teaches us that he is the true temple of God, and that we are his Body, his Mystical Body, in whom the Trinity dwells by virtue of our baptisms.

Yes, today we remember the Dedication of the Cathedral of Rome, St. John Lateran. We also remember that we too are dedicated temples of God’s presence.

***We are*** ***what we ultimately celebrate today***. May we reverence one another.