

Dedication of the Lateran Basilica  
November 9, 2025

Friends the Catholic Church today celebrates the Dedication of the Basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome. When we think of important Churches, we often first think of St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, so why do we celebrate the dedication of St. John Lateran? Because it is the cathedral Church for the Bishop of Rome (i.e. the Pope) and not St. Peter's. It is from there that the Pope guides the Church of Rome and the whole Church. Inside is the inscription "The Mother and Head of All Churches of the City and the World". So this church, more than others, has a special meaning for all Catholics; we look to it as the Mother Church for us all and as a sign of our unity with Rome.

The name 'Lateran' comes from the fact that the land for the church was given by the Laterani family in Rome, and 'John' because the Church was dedicated to honour John the Baptist and John the Evangelist. It was dedicated as a church in 324 A.D., and it was the first public church in Rome. Before this Christians experienced much persecution making it difficult to build a church. Instead, they often met in homes or other hidden places for Mass. However, once it became possible, Christians have built churches throughout the world as places set aside for the worship of God.

The Gospel for the feast day today is the account of Jesus cleansing the Temple. There was only one Temple for the Jews, and it was in Jerusalem. While many communities had local synagogues for prayer and study, the Temple was the only place where sacrifices were offered to God. It also had been the place where the Ark of the Covenant with the Ten Commandments were kept, and thus it was seen as the place of God's presence among His people. Those two elements of the Temple are important to keep in mind: sacrifices and the presence of God. The Jewish people went to the Temple several times a year to offer sacrifices and to pay for the upkeep of the Temple. Since many travelled a long distance, they may have had to purchase an animal for sacrifice or change their currency. It seems the money changers and sellers took advantage of this for their own greed. Jesus would not allow His Father's house to be turned into a marketplace.

Yet, there is a deeper truth in this passage. Jesus mysteriously says, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” and the Gospel writer adds, “Jesus was speaking of the Temple of His body”. Remember the Temple was the place where sacrifices were offered to God and represented God’s presence in a special way. Jesus is saying here that He will become the new Temple. His body will be the perfect sacrifice and the place where God’s presence is found. Jesus fulfills in Himself the essential role of the Temple.

Jesus words were fulfilled. The Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans about 40 years after He died, and it has never been rebuilt. All Temple sacrifices ended. The one sacrifice that remains is the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. This is what we hold in our Catholic Churches today. It is the heart of the Mass. The one sacrifice of Jesus is made present upon the altar at the Mass and offered to the God the Father for our salvation. Under the appearance of bread and wine the Body and Blood of Jesus become truly present and are offered for us. The Mass makes present the sacrifice of Calvary; this is the key to appreciating the Mass. Our church buildings are at the service of this great mystery. Even if, like the early Christians, we do not have a church building, the key is Jesus Himself. He is the perfect sacrifice and the true presence of God among us.

Additionally, all of us who are joined to Jesus, become members of His body. In this way, our lives can become an offering to God with Jesus and our souls become the place where God dwells. Let us pray today that this reflection on the cleansing of the Temple will give us both a deeper reverence for the Mass and a deeper appreciation for the dignity of our own souls as Temples of God, enkindling a desire to keep free from sin and focussed the worship of God.