

Homily for the Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica
Ezekiel 47: 1-2, 8-9, 12; Psalm 146; 1 Cor. 3: 9c-11, 16-17; John 2: 13-22
November 9, 2014

For the people of Israel, their temple was a visible sign that God had pitched his tent among them.

The ark, located in the holy of holies of the Temple building, contained the 10 commandments written on stone by the finger of God, the proof that the people of Israel belonged to God.

The temple was a place where the people of Israel went on a regular basis to offer sacrifices and worship the God who had chosen them for his own people.

So, when Jesus cleanses the temple of the money changers and expels those selling animals for sacrifice, the people basically ask him, “Who do you think you are? Prove to us that you have the right to do such a thing!” Jesus’ response, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” goes right over their heads, because they are thinking on only the physical level of a temple made of mortar and stone, while he is referring to the temple of his body.

This is the mystery in all of the Gospels, that people do not recognize Jesus for who he is: the temple of the living God, the very presence of God walking in their midst. They focus on the visible reality of the temple building, but there is something much more they are missing, visible only through the eyes of faith.

By his incarnation (taking our flesh), the Son of God pitches his tent among the human race—God makes his home forever with us.

By his resurrection, the Son of God changes everything.

Now human beings can become temples of the living God because of his rising from the dead after 3 days in the tomb, because the very Spirit that raised Jesus up has been poured out upon the earth.

Because Christ is Risen, he can share in a very special and powerful way the gift of His Risen life with his followers, the divine indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

How do we come to share in divine life?

When do we become temples of the living God?

Why in the waters of baptism, of course!

As baptized Christians, we are Christ’s body. We are temples of his Spirit.

We are children of our Heavenly Father.

The Triune God make his home within us through the Sacrament of Baptism.

The prophet Ezekiel uses the image of water flowing from the Temple to encourage the Israelites living in exile that God will bring them to new life.

That powerful image of living water flowing from the temple points also to the life-giving reality of baptism.

Living water is an image of the divine life that is poured into us at baptism, the living water of God's grace which transforms everything it touches and changes us forever.

Like the water flowing from the temple, the living water of baptism makes everything fresh and new, resulting in an abundance of life, because this life is divine. By the power given us in baptism, we are able to produce life-giving fruit for others to feast on.

Like the Samaritan woman at the well, we drink of this living water, which is Christ Jesus himself, and we become a new creation. For in baptism we die with him in order to rise up with him to new life, to share divine life, to become a temple of the living God!!

How easily we forget our divine dignity!

How quickly we forget the power of the Spirit longing to be at work in us!

With the Christians at Corinth in the 1st century, and with Christians of every age, we have to be reminded that we are God's building.

We need to have our consciences pricked by the probing question of St. Paul, a question addressed to Christians of all times and places:

"Do you not know you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"
DO YOU NOT KNOW....?

Baptism reflects the deepest reality of our faith, that God chooses to love us first, before we are worthy of such love, that Christ died on the cross for us while we were still sinners.

We profess our faith in this "first love" of God, a God who chooses us before we choose God, by baptizing children.

Thus, as children grow physically, they are meant to grow spiritually, embracing more fully with each passing day their dignity as God's adopted children. As we grow bodily, we are meant to grow in our understanding of what it means to be a temple of the living God.

But, how many of us who are now adults stopped growing spiritually when we were in our teens, thinking that when we were Confirmed that was the end of our faith journey?

How many of us adults still have a child's understanding of our faith, have not grown in our understanding of what it means to be temples of the living God? If we truly believe that we are God's temple, that the Spirit of God lives in us, then that will impact everything we do in and with these temples.

If we truly believe that God dwells in us, this belief impacts what we watch with our eyes, what we listen to with our ears, what we hold in our hands, what we say with our tongues, what we eat, and anything we take into or put into our bodies.

Since the Spirit of the Risen Christ lives within us, we have the power to love others through these bodies as Christ loves us, laying down our lives in love. The water of divine life bubbling up within us overflows into the lives of others, whose thirst for God is quenched by our love for them.

This solemnity of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica celebrates that God's dwelling place on earth is not a building made of stone, but a community of disciples born from the death of Christ and the life-giving waters of baptism. This feast celebrates the living reality of the Church, of flesh and blood disciples who are living stones in God's building, resting upon the foundation who is Christ Jesus.

The "Church of the Jacobins" is located in southern France in the town of Toulouse. It is the mother church of the Dominican order, where St. Dominic used to preach in the 12th century and where the body of one of the most famous Dominicans is buried—St. Thomas Aquinas.

But today it is a museum---it is no longer a place where the faithful gather on a regular basis to offer praise and worship to God. It is a beautiful building, but it feels empty, because there are no longer living-stones joined to its structure, no longer a community of disciples to bring it to life.

The Rose Window in the north transept in the church called "Notre Dame" in Paris is one of the most spectacular stained glass windows in the world. It has 800,000 pieces of glass, is 700 years old, and cannot be duplicated today, even with all our technology.

However, even more beautiful are the people of God illuminated by the fire of the Spirit.

At Lourdes, where the Blessed Mother appeared to St. Bernandette in the 19th century, there is a nightly procession by believers from around the world with lit candles where the rosary is prayed in multiple languages.

At the end of each decade, all those in the procession hold up their candles and sing, "Ave Maria."

Their faces lit by these candles, their voices united in praise, This is the living Church, the temple of the living God, and this Church is more beautiful than any building made by human hands.