

9th November Dedication of the Lateran Basilica

Gospel: Jn. 2:13-22.

Our church buildings are sacred places consecrated to God. Not only is their consecration an important act in itself, but we need to reflect on what happens inside the building. Just as a chalice which contains the precious Blood of Christ is no longer “just a wine cup” so the very building in which the sacraments take place and where the Lord resides in His tabernacle is made holy by presence of God.

Church buildings are not rain shelters, but their very design and construction is intended to lift our souls heavenwards. Think about the cruciform design of many churches and cathedrals. The sanctuary is at the top of the cross, where Christ's head is and in a church building this



is where the priest and servers are. This is the holiest place because the priest at Mass is there in the person of Christ the head. We, the congregation are present in the person of the Body of Christ and so occupy the nave, (where on a cross, Christ's body is).

The decor of the church building is also important. Even the Temple in the desert was constructed with the best of materials and gold was used for the Ark of the Covenant where the tablets of the Ten Commandments, a sample of manna and Aaron's staff which had budded, were kept (Exodus chapter 25). Rich materials, images and arches are intended to lift the soul heavenwards. Imagine in the days before the proliferation of images, how stunning it would be to enter into a highly decorated building with coloured sunlight streaming through stained glass windows!

In today's Gospel we see the scene of Jesus overturning the tables in the Temple, scolding the sellers for turning His Father's house into a market (v.16). The authorities did not stop Jesus but challenged His actions, to which Jesus replies, “Destroy this sanctuary and in three days I will raise it up” (v.19). The Jews

are astonished as they refer to the length of time it took for the current temple to be built, but Jesus is referring to His own Body.

The Church building is a sign of the presence of Jesus in the locality. At our baptism, we are united to Christ and become a part of His Body on earth, but entering a consecrated Church building we are “entering” Christ. After Christ’s Resurrection, St Thomas famously doubted and says that unless he put his finger into the holes made by the nails, he would not believe. A week later, Jesus appears to the Apostles and St Thomas is present. Jesus invited him to put his finger into the holes and what happens as soon as St Thomas “enters” the body of Jesus? He recognises the presence of God and says “My Lord and my God” (Jn. 20:26-28).

Therefore, all around the world, dioceses keep the feast of dedication of their mother Church, their cathedral. The Lateran Basilica in Rome was built by the Emperor Constantine on the Lateran Hill in Rome in about 324. It is in fact the cathedral of the bishop of Rome (St. Peter’s in Rome is not a cathedral) and as such is the mother Church of the diocese of Rome. However, the diocese of Rome is the mother diocese of the whole Catholic Church and so this is why the Church celebrates this day as a feast day.

Next time we are permitted to enter into our parish Church, make the Sign of the Cross (we all used to with holy water) and genuflect if you can to the tabernacle. The church building is a sacred place where heaven and earth meet.

(Carol Ann Harnett)

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