

Dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome

November 9, 2025

Ez 47:1-2, 8-9, 12
Psalm 84:3-6,8,113
1 Cor 3:9c-11, 16-17
John 2:13-22

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Today the Church throughout the world celebrates the dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome, known as the “Mother Church of Christendom.” The original basilica was given to the church in the 4th century by the Emperor Constantine. It has been destroyed by fire and earthquake, rebuilt, and is still today the official cathedral of the Pope and the church of Rome.

But why do we celebrate the dedication of this *one* church?

Because it symbolizes the union of the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world?

Absolutely.

Because it is historically important and artistically beautiful? Certainly.

And because it reminds us that God shows up in the most unexpected places.

Who could have imagined that in the center of the empire that killed Jesus Christ, executed Peter and Paul, and martyred countless other Christians, a mighty church would one day rise? Who could have anticipated that after palaces fell to dust and temples lay in ruins, this one church would be rebuilt again and again?

Indeed, who could have dreamed that the crude cult of a strange faith from a distant part of the world would one day fill the eternal city with *many* churches?

Who could have looked up at the Cross, seen Christ bleeding and broken, abandoned by his followers, despised by the crowds and destined for a dishonorable grave, and thought, “One

day, that man will conquer the Eternal City. His followers will claim Rome as their own, proclaim his gospel in her streets, feed her poor, and shake her buildings with their prayers and hymns”?

Could any of the disciples, even the Blessed Mother, have imagined that their names would one day be celebrated in the heart of the empire, and be carried from there to every corner of the world?

God shows up in the most unexpected places: In the womb of a lowly woman, in the stable of a little town, on the roads of a backwater nation, on the cross of a great empire, and on this altar. He came to earth, came to Rome, and comes to us this day, at this Mass, in his body and blood. “Come! behold the deeds of the LORD, the astounding things he has wrought on earth.”

In today’s gospel, the Savior for whom Israel longs suddenly comes to his Temple. His arrival is unexpected, just as his word has been unwelcome. This is the cause of Jesus’ anger. In the place where he should have been most welcome, he is rejected. In the building commissioned by His Father to be a place of true worship, sacrifice, and forgiveness, Christ is a stranger. The Temple, with its grand columns and beautiful decorations, is lifeless, no better than a drained battery or a dry well. The Temple should have prepared Israel for the coming of God, but instead it is a citadel of opposition to Christ.

Ezekiel saw the Temple bringing life and refreshment to the whole world, pouring forth water that makes the salt seas fresh and the earth abundant with fruit. But instead this Temple is sterile and lifeless. If the Temple were a house of prayer for the children of Abraham, they would imitate Abraham by hearing and obeying the voice of God. If the Temple were a place of true

worship for the children of Israel, they would be consumed by zeal for the Gospel, full of love for the one sent by the Father. If the Temple were a wellspring of holiness, the people would beg Christ to give them water for eternal life (John 4:10). But Israel cannot bear to hear Christ's word (John 8:43). God comes to His house at the heart of the nation He has chosen and His own, but His arrival is unexpected, His visitation is unrecognized. Is it any wonder Christ is angry?

And what of us? God shows up in so many places: in the poor and the sick and the lonely. The Lord draws near to those who seek his forgiveness, who suffer injustice, who are lost and brokenhearted. He tells us that whenever we care for them, we care for him. Are we surprised that he shows up just where he said he would?

St. Paul writes to us, "Brothers and sisters: You are God's building.... Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" But if we are strangers to the nursing home, strangers to the soup kitchen, strangers to the houses of grieving friends, how can we welcome the Lord and rejoice in his coming?

On this feast of the dedication of the Lateran Basilica, let us remember that the Gospel came to Rome, where it was not expected and was not welcomed, and to Jerusalem, where it was not welcomed but should have been expected. Let us imitate our Lord in both ways. Let us go where we are not expected: to the relative isolated by addiction, to the neighbor whose marriage is threatened, to the friend who has wandered from the faith. Let us go, and go back, and return, and return so often that we find ourselves expected, welcomed, at home.

And let us also go into the temple of our hearts. Let us drive out sin, and set up a true altar, and offer our lives as an acceptable sacrifice to the Father. And in that temple which we are, may the Holy Spirit dwell, and may the least of our brothers and sisters always be welcome.