

## Homily of the Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica, 2025

Ezekiel 47:1-2, 8-9, 12; Psalm 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9; 1 Corinthians 3:9-11, 16-17; John 2:13-22

We begin with differentiating between a cathedral and a basilica. **Cathedral:** The word's origin comes from the Latin word “cathedra,” meaning “chair,” which refers to the bishop's chair. It is the principal church building of a diocese that contains the bishop's throne or seat. **Basilica:** The word originated from the Greek word “basilike” meaning “royal house.” It is a church building that has been granted special privileges by the pope as a center of worship due to its historical or spiritual importance.

According to history, when Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity, he donated the royal Lateran family land to the Catholic Church. While the emperor constructed the building, Pope Silvester I oversaw the construction and consecrated it in 324 AD. The basilica is called Lateran Basilica because it was built on the Lateran land.

The Lateran Basilica is known as the “Mother Church” because it is the official cathedral of the pope who is the Bishop of Rome, making it the seat of papal authority and the symbolic head of all Catholic churches worldwide. The frontage of the basilica bears the inscription “Most Holy Lateran Church, Mother and Head of all the Churches in the City and the World.” The Lateran Basilica is the first basilica and the only church building which the commemoration of its dedication celebrated as a feast.

Throughout its history, the basilica has been severely damaged or destroyed multiple times by earthquakes, fires, and military sackings. As a result, it has undergone numerous repairs and complete rebuilds. For instance: The basilica was plundered during the sackings of Rome by the Vandals and Visigoths in the 5th century. It was devastated by earthquakes in 896 and in 1349. It was ruined by fires in 1308 and in 1360. It was damaged by mafia bombing in 1993. This is why the basilica church building is celebrated as an enduring symbol of the Universal Church. The basilica is the only church building which the commemoration of its dedication is celebrated as a feast.

The feast is a celebration of the unity of the Universal Church under the leadership of the Pope. The Lateran Church building is a symbol of the Catholic Church's resilience, strength, and unity. The celebration teaches us strength, resilience, and rebuilding after crises, losses, and setbacks.

The first reading is Prophet Ezekiel's vision of live-giving water which flowed from the threshold (entrance) of the temple. The water flowed into salt waters and made the salt waters fresh. The flowing waters made creatures live, grow, and bear fruit. By the power of the flowing water, some creatures become food for others, while some become medicine for others.

This image represents Jesus, the Temple and the Head of the Church. We are the Body of the Temple. Jesus is the source of all graces and the Church is the conduit through which the graces flow into the world. And it is through us, the People of God, that the graces reach every man and every woman and all corners of the earth. The church building does not move or preach or minister to the people. We are the feet, the hand, and the mouth of the church building. St. Paul says in the second reading, “You are God's building.” “...you are the temple of God.” Today, we are reminded and empowered so that we do not fall short of becoming channels and conduits of God's graces and blessings to our neighbors and the world. The end of the Ezekiel's vision is, “Their fruit serve for food, and their leaves for medicine.” We are charged with these responsibilities. We are the life-giving waters. We are the food. We are the medicine.

When Jesus went into the temple in Jerusalem, what he saw was a complete opposite of Ezekiel's vision of the temple. "He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as the money-changers seated there. He made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables, and to those who sold doves he said, 'Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace.'" Matthew and Luke are not as mild as John. In the two Gospels, Jesus says, "It is written: 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you are making it a den of thieves" (Matthew 21:13; Luke 19:46).

We must not shy away from these words as if they do not speak to truth about us and about the situation of the Church in many places. Commercialization and monetization of religion, whereby financial gain and profit supersede spiritual meaning and salvation is a big problem. If Jesus walks into our parish, will he see graces and blessings flowing or will he walk into a marketplace and den of thieves? St. Paul gives another explanation of "marketplace" / "den of thieves", ... "envy, rivalry, insults, evil suspicions, and mutual friction, ... people with corrupted minds, who are deprived of the truth, supposing religion to be a means of gain" (1 Timothy 6:4-5).

On a personal level, if Jesus walks into my life or my family, will he see graces and blessings flowing or will he walk into corrupted minds and marketplace?

Today, with the Lateran Basilica as a symbol, we celebrate the Catholic Church's resilience, strength, and unity. The celebration teaches us unity, strength, resilience, and rebuilding after crises, losses, and setbacks. We are reminded that we are conduits and channels of God's graces and blessing to our neighbors and the world. We are supposed to be life-givers and life-changers. Jesus says, "Whoever believes in me, ... 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him'" (John 7:38). May these words be fulfilled in us.

May Jesus visit us and cleanse every 'marketplace' situation in our Church and in our lives. Amen.

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