

Anniversary of the Dedication of the Church  
October 15, 2017

*The Glory of the Lord Fills the Temple*

Readings: Ezekiel 43: 1-2, 3-7; Ephesians 2:19-22; Matthew 16:13-19

The special readings for today are assigned for the commemoration of the anniversary of the Dedication of a Church. While this Cathedral opened for worship in 1915, its interior was stark and unadorned. It took nearly two generations for the interior to be finished, and it was not until October 14, 1958 that it was formally consecrated, for substantial completion was a prerequisite.

The first reading from Ezekiel is a powerful image of the glory that resides in God's House. Recall, the Temple had been destroyed during a siege to Jerusalem about 587 B.C. It lay in ruins, and the people were sent into exile. This is the backdrop of the prophet's call and his vision of rebuilding. In the vision, Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord enter into the new temple with the most powerful earthly manifestations. [Ez 43 is inscribed in the dome of the sacristy.]

Contemplating the reality of this Cathedral, this temple of the New Covenant, we come to the realization of God's dwelling with us here in all His glory. We are also deeply conscious of our responsibility to care for this Church, not an easy task and one that requires the sacrifices of so many to accomplish. We desire that its beauty will never be diminished, but that it would remain a constant sign for parishioners, regular visitors, and all who walk through these doors even once. It is even a sign to those who may never enter.

Cardinal Burke, in reflecting on this text while celebrating the anniversary of the Dedication of the Shrine in La Crosse, WI noted: "The restoration of the ancient temple would indeed be for God's children the sign of His abiding presence with them, for the temple was the privileged place of prayer and sacrifice, the place of the encounter with the glory of God."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Cardinal Burke, Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, LaCrosse, WI 31 July 2010

In other words, this vision of Ezekiel needs to be made concrete and real, lest it remain merely a vision. It has to come to fruition. And frankly, the reason why we celebrate anniversaries of dedication is not primarily to honor a building, but rather what and Whom that building represents.

The “glory” of which is spoken is nothing less than the presence of God Himself in our midst. Do we believe that he is in our midst; do we believe that he dwells here amongst us? What the Prophet Ezekiel saw in the vision of the new temple has become a reality in the Church, in our lives as living members of the Church. God the Son Incarnate, seated in glory at the right hand of the Father, is, at the very same time, dwelling amongst us.<sup>2</sup>

Today the Church professes the abiding and objective presence of God in the new and indestructible Temple which is the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ. The consecratory candles envelope us in the light of Christ, indicating the very spots where the bishop applied the Sacred Chrism to the walls. We enter into this space, truly a gateway to heaven, a starting point directing us onward into realms we cannot fully appreciate now.

On Friday evening, I witnessed something of a first. In 28 years as a priest, and even in my memory before that, I have never seen so many people visit the Cathedral for a Mass or Prayer Service. I was completely floored. The message of Fatima powerfully speaks to us today. It is not merely an historical event, but a sign of Mary’s love. I am so glad the Archbishop remarked- “Isn’t it great to be Catholic?!” His words were met with thundering applause!

There was and there is this palpable sense in which people are tired of mourning in this local Church. We want to rejoice in our faith;

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<sup>2</sup> cf. Cardinal Burke’s homily cited above.

we need to celebrate, and that is precisely what we did. We neither deny, nor gloss over the serious issues that caused this situation, but we believe that God is calling us to move forward in faith. And that is precisely what happened. Perhaps now we begin a new chapter in the life of this local Church.

These doors protect us, they are a place of refuge from the storms of the world, but they cannot contain us. Each day, we must leave them, and go into the world. We cannot camp out, for the purpose of any Church building is to fortify and strengthen us to re-enter the world spiritually refreshed.

These walls have been anointed with the sacred Chrism, a visible reminder that God has chosen to dwell here with us. May our lives reflect the radiant beauty of God's love, strengthened from within these walls, to go out to transform the world.