

Feast of the Dedication of St. John Lateran

November 8-9, 2014

Readings: Ezekiel 47:1-2, 8-9, 12; 1 Corinthians 3:9c-11, 16-17; John 2:13-22

The readings selected for the occasion of the feast of the dedication of a Church are fascinating in themselves. In our first reading from the Book of Ezekiel, one of the more difficult books to interpret, given its frequent use of symbolism. Ezekiel's vision of water pouring out of the East side of the Temple, and then heading slightly south through the Kidron Valley all the way to the Dead Sea, paints a vivid picture. Once there, the Dead Sea turns the lifeless salty water into fresh water— a place where fish abound and trees grow abundantly on the shores.

The vision is nothing short of a miracle that attests to the life-giving power of God dwelling in the sanctuary.¹ This alone presents challenges to say the least. Did Ezekiel really think that the Dead Sea would be turned to fresh water? If so, he would be sadly disappointed, for it remains to this day ten times as salty as the oceans.

Ezekiel was a prophet in very difficult times. Ezekiel had accompanied the inhabitants of Jerusalem into Exile in Babylonia, and his visions foretold the destruction of Jerusalem. But the enemies will be defeated and their “defeat is prelude to Ezekiel's vision of a new Israel whose source of life and prosperity is a well-ordered cult in a new Temple, where the divine glory again dwells.”²

This reading is most appropriate for the celebration of the Feast of the Dedication of a Church. Today, we are celebrating the Cathedral Church of Rome, originally dedicated to Our Most Holy Savior, making today's feast also a Feast of the Lord.

¹ The Old Testament Book of Ezekiel is a mixture of prose and poetry, extremely detailed historical accounts, mythological allusions, and imaginative visions with vivid dramatic descriptions. Cf. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, page 327.

² Introduction to the Book of Ezekiel, New American Bible, USCCB website.

One reason why this passage is selected for the Feast of the Dedication of a Church is because the image of the flowing stream from the temple so beautifully describes the spiritual significance of a place of worship. In the Catholic tradition, we attach great importance to beauty and art within worship. A Church building, if it evokes what is intended, lifts our minds and hearts to God, literally to the heavens.

The Cathedral sacristy dome has inscribed along its edge a key section of Ezekiel's vision, so clear are the allusions to the graces that we Catholics believe flow from the Eucharist. Indeed, the glory of the Lord fills the Temple, and the Church's worship is born from the life giving water and blood that flowed from the side of Christ on the Cross.

But far more than the aesthetic beauty of a building, Ezekiel rightly envisions spiritual life flowing from the Temple. His vision focused on the blessings that would flow from the Lord's presence among His People. There is something fundamentally different about this building than a school, a store, a stadium or your house. God is indeed present in all those places, without question. But what happens here is unique.

The life-giving waters of baptism reach their pinnacle as the people of God gather to offer their spiritual sacrifices to the Lord, rightfully exercising their participation in the common priesthood of Jesus. Through the ministerial priesthood, the sacred Body and Blood of Jesus Christ is made present, unparalleled spiritual food for the journey.

I have always enjoyed driving, even on longer trips. Whether in driving through Chicago where one cannot help but notice the magnificent Polish Catholic churches visible from Interstate 94, or through rural towns in Iowa in which the steeple peeks out in the horizon- God's presence is manifest in a unique way. These churches were labors of love, often over decades, made possible only through tremendous sacrifice. As we look to the 100th anniversary since the opening of this great church this next year, may we never forget those sacrifices.

We enjoy today the fruits of the prayers, labors and sacrifices of those who went before us. We best honor their sacrifices both with our gratitude, and by the care with which we maintain this beautiful Cathedral. May we be ever more aware of the graces that flow from the sides of our Church by means of the graces of the Eucharist.

This idyllic scene from the first reading is in contrast to the sad reality of how some had dishonored the sacred spaces through their own behavior. In driving from the Temple those people who were disgracing it, Jesus shows forth righteous anger in today's Gospel. The money chagers were obscuring its true purpose as the House of God.

We need to be so vigilant to maintain a proper sense of reverence in God's house. We need to balance a legitimate need for fellowship and conversation with other people's need for quiet recollection, especially before Mass. The efforts we put into keeping the building clean and orderly speaks volumes of our respect for this sacred space.

As we commemorate the dedication of St. John Lateran, the Cathedral Church in Rome, we are aware of the blessings of all our churches. We are also mindful of whom we honor through our buildings. We surely honor the tremendous human and artistic gifts possessed by people of all times and places. But those gifts are from the Lord Himself, whom we honor above all in our places of worship. Above all else, this is God's House.

Let us never forget to be thankful for the manifold graces we experience through our parish and the sacraments celebrated here. This is truly our lifeblood, our family of faith, our spiritual home.