

DEDICATION OF THE LATERAN BASILICA - NOVEMBER 9 11-9-2025 Homily

I. Introduction

There are many great Catholic cathedrals or basilicas around the world, including St. Patrick in New York City, Notre Dame in Paris, Santiago de Compostela in Spain, der Dom in the German city of Cologne, St. Stephen in Vienna, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth, and, of course, St. Peter's in Rome. Also located in Rome is the Basilica of St. John Lateran, the building which the Church honors with the special feast we're celebrating today. The original structure dates back to the 4th century; it was given to the Church by the Emperor Constantine to serve as a residence for the Popes. The Pope, of course, is the Bishop of Rome, and St. John Lateran is his cathedral (not St. Peter's Basilica)—and celebrating today's feast is a way of expressing our submission to, and unity with, the Holy Father.

Church buildings can be very special places. When I was growing up, the church at my home parish of St. Clement in Romeo was a room at the end of the school, better suited as a parish hall than a church—and in fact, after the new church was built, it became the bingo hall. As a child, it seemed rather large to me—but in fact, it was quite small. The new church, built in 1969, was much larger and much better suited for Mass. I have been assigned to nine different parishes: two as a deacon, four as an associate pastor, and three as pastor; these have all had a wide variety of church buildings—some large, some small in size; some very old, others relatively new; some in very good physical shape, others requiring extensive work or repairs. Over the years some priests have been assigned to begin a new parish, and that involves the very complicated and expensive process of building a church. I'm grateful I've never had to do that, but several times I have been involved in renovation or repair projects. In my thirteen years here at Immaculate Conception, for instance, we've put on a new church roof, improved ventilation, replaced the heating and cooling system, repaired extensive water damage to the walls and ceiling, repainted some of the statues and walls, shored up the foundation on the west side of church, and most recently, completely replaced the church floor and installed new carpeting. All these repairs or preservation projects were possible through your generosity and willingness to get involved. This historic, holy building is very important to us, and visitors often remark on the beauty of our church.

Physical structures are necessary for obvious reasons: we need a warm, comfortable, and secure place for the celebration of Mass and the Sacraments. However, our buildings are also important for spiritual reasons. If you entered an unoccupied Protestant church, it might—depending on its age and appearance—seem peaceful, holy, and inspiring, but it would not be the same as a Catholic church. Unlike other religions, we have the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist by means of the Hosts reserved or stored in the tabernacle. A Protestant church is empty most of the week, but because of the Presence of Jesus, a Catholic church is never empty. That's why, here at I.C., we have Eucharistic Adoration every Tuesday evening and Friday morning, and that's why, during the week, we keep the side door unlocked until about 7pm: so that there are ample opportunities for you to come and spend quiet time with the Lord. For us as Catholics, church buildings are reminders of the true home awaiting us in God's Kingdom. Our churches, especially during Mass, are the place where we are most united to God; this is where we are closest to Heaven while still here on earth.

II. Development

Any place, and any item, set aside for the worship of God is sacred or holy, and must be treated with profound respect. The fact that this rule was being ignored or violated in the temple area by the money-changers and merchants made Jesus very angry. Such behavior is a grave sin; we mustn't come to the house of God seeking material or financial benefits, but spiritual ones. The prophet Ezekiel had a vision of life-giving water flowing from the temple, providing nourishment and blessing for those who are just, and in the Gospel Jesus speaks of His own Body as the true temple of God, through Whom we find salvation. St. Paul develops this idea in the 2nd Reading, stating that through Christ we too become sacred dwelling places for the Holy Spirit. As the Apostle notes, this should make a real difference—for Jesus is the only sure foundation on which to build our lives.

III. Conclusion

What does all this mean for us in practical terms? Simply that, when it comes to religion and faith, our example and influence should somehow touch and inspire others. We probably wouldn't be proud of a church building that was non-descript and unappealing in appearance, something that could pass for a bingo hall or warehouse. We want a church that looks like a church. In the same way, Jesus wants His disciples to look and act as true *disciples*, putting Him at the center of their lives, resisting the false values of this world, and using their opportunities to share their faith with others, instead of hiding it or acting embarrassed by it. If we truly respect the Real Presence of Jesus here in church, we will dress neatly and appropriately, we will arrive on time for Mass and not leave early, we will not bring in outside food or drink (unless necessary for medical purposes), we will not talk unnecessarily during Mass, we will try to keep and leave everything in a neat and orderly condition, we will try to maintain a prayerful and reverent spirit, and we will do our best to avoid distractions and participate fully in the liturgy—including a worthy reception of Holy Communion, followed by silent prayers of adoration, gratitude, and intercession on behalf of others.

The Basilica of St. John Lateran has a long and noble history—but that doesn't even begin to compare with the eternal dwelling places awaiting us in Heaven. It is God's will that each of us achieve our destiny of everlasting glory, and that we help those around us do this, too. Every Catholic church is meant to be a reminder of Heaven, a place where we receive God's grace, and an inspiration to surrender our lives completely into His hands. If we allow the Lord to live in us in this way, we are assured of one day dwelling in, and rejoicing in, His Kingdom forever.

