

Ezekiel 47:1-2, 8-9, 12; Ps 46(45):2-3. 5-6. 8-9; 1 Cor:9c-11, 16-17; John 2:13-22

The Lateran Basilica was built by the Emperor Constantine on the Lateran Hill in Rome in about 324. The feast of its dedication has been celebrated in Rome on this date since the twelfth century. In honour of the basilica, “the mother and head of all the churches of the City and the World,” the feast has been extended to the whole Catholic Church as a sign of unity and love towards the See of Peter, which St Ignatius of Antioch said in the second century, “presides over the whole assembly of charity.”¹ That is to say the people of God.

It is fitting then that today’s readings are dominated by buildings and holiness. But what does this mean for me and my pattern of life?

Starting with the reading from the prophet Ezekiel we are told about a vision of the Temple – that is to say, the Temple in Jerusalem – that has a stream flowing from its Eastern side, and south of the altar. The life giving stream courses through the Arabah which is a huge expanse of wilderness following a rift and a natural border, from the Sea of Galilee in the north to the Red Sea, known as the Gulf or Aquaba, to the south. The temple represents God and holiness. The water that streams from it represents the life that God gives. The lifegiving water streams into desolate places and then into the sea, and this means that God’s gifts of healing and good things, originating from the Temple, are intended for the whole world.

The Gospel and the reading from the letter of St Paul to the Corinthians, make a huge seismological shift. The presence of God is no longer in the Temple, but the person of Christ himself. He is the living

temple of God. So, when standing in the Temple at Jerusalem, when Jesus says ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up’ he is not speaking about the walls around him, rather ‘He was speaking about the temple of his body.’² But the imagery goes beyond Jesus being the dwelling place of God. When Jesus is crucified, he is pierced by the spear of a soldier. This would have been from underneath, into his heart, that is to say on his eastern side, south of the altar which is his heart. From this wound, according to the testimony of St John, ‘came out blood and water.’³ This is the river of life which we seen in Ezekiel’s vision, now fulfilled in the life blood of Jesus, which we receive at Holy Communion, which is offered for the redemption of the whole world.

St Paul takes this God given example and applies it to all Christians, surely correctly. We are to be imitators of Christ. We are to become living temples of God, whom we receive at Baptism. If we remember anything from today’s readings it should be that final line from St Paul’s letter: ‘For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple’. You are that temple because you have been bathed in the holy water that flows from the temple of Christ and drunk of his sacrifice which flows from his side.

This holy building is dedicated to God. You are dedicated to God. We are united in the body of the Church, which is visible to us when we receive Holy Communion and when we pray for the Pope.

This is true, but it cannot be just received, it has to be given life by what we do, otherwise we are just parched land gasping for life. What do we do? Bishop Patrick sends all his priests’ a monthly letter, and in this month’s letter, reminding us that St John Henry Newman was being

¹ Universalis for the day.

² John 2:22,

³ John 19:34

recognised as a doctor of the Church on All Saints Day. Bishop Patrick also included a fine extract from St John Henry Newman, suggesting that we might share it. So I will do just that:

"It is the saying of holy men that, if we wish to be perfect, we have nothing more to do than to perform the ordinary duties of the day well.... There are no short ways to perfection, but there are sure ones. I think this is an instruction which may be of great practical use to persons like ourselves. It is easy to have vague ideas what perfection is, which serve well enough to talk about, when we do not intend to aim at it; but as soon as a person really desires and sets about seeking it himself, he is dissatisfied with anything but what is tangible and clear, and constitutes some sort of direction towards the practice of it.

We must bear in mind what is meant by perfection. It does not mean any extraordinary service, anything out of the way, or especially heroic ... but it means what the word 'perfection' ordinarily means. By perfect we mean that which has no flaw in it, that which is complete, that which is consistent, that which is sound – we mean the opposite to imperfect. As we know well what imperfection in religious service means, we know by the contrast what is meant by perfection. He, then, is perfect who does the work of the day perfectly, and we need not go beyond this to seek for perfection. ...

I insist on this because I think it will simplify our views, and fix our exertions on a definite aim. If you ask me what you are to do in order to be perfect, I say, first – Do not lie in bed beyond the due time of rising; give your first thoughts to God; make a good visit to the Blessed Sacrament; say the Angelus devoutly; eat and drink to God's glory; say the Rosary well; be recollected; keep out bad thoughts; make your evening meditation well; examine yourself daily; go to bed in good time, and you are already perfect"⁴

This seemed to me to be sound advice, a sound way to make both the building and the body holy temples and to sanctify the world.

⁴ Newman, St John Henry, *A short road to perfection* (27th September 1856)