

Dedication of the Lateran Basilica – November 9, 2025 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.  
Cathedral of Saint Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 7:15, 8:30, & 11:00am Sunday Masses – 800 words

We celebrate this Sunday the Feast of the Dedication of the Basilica of Saint John Lateran, which is the Holy Father's cathedral church in Rome. Its full name is the "Archbasilica of the Most Holy Savior and of Saints John the Baptist and the Evangelist in the Lateran" – the "Lateran" referring to the name of the donor family who previously owned the land on which it was built just over 1,700 years ago. But we're used to celebrating feast days of saints or that are connected with mysteries of our faith: why would we celebrate the dedication of a church?

The simple reason is that it is the pope's cathedral as Bishop of Rome; therefore, it is the "universal cathedral". But the deeper reason has to do with the purpose of a church building to begin with: it is supposed to be a beautiful, consecrated or dedicated edifice that lifts our hearts to God; in which we encounter God, especially through the sacraments; in which we worship God, again, especially through the celebration of the sacraments; and that makes us think of the true and eternal temple in heaven, which is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ himself.

And in the second reading Saint Paul reminded us of our union with Christ through the Spirit, which has made each one of us a temple, too. In the first dispensation, the temple was the place for worship of God that was imperfect – the sacrifice of animals. In the new dispensation, the true center of fitting worship is the God-man himself, Jesus Christ, who offered the perfect sacrifice of himself to the Father, and associates us with him in offering that sacrifice through the celebration of the sacraments – which we do especially in consecrated places called churches.

But unlike with the sacrifice of something external to us like a goat or a calf, we, filled with the Holy Spirit and profoundly united with Christ through baptism and confirmation, join ourselves to his self-offering. This is why the priest says "Pray, brethren, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable" at the offertory: because each of us is here to offer God fitting and acceptable worship. We should prepare our hearts accordingly and make an offering to him that is indeed worthy. Hopefully, the externals of our worship assist us in making that fitting offering.

Thus we maintain a beautiful and orderly church; we strive to have fine music and a reverent atmosphere. We maintain our sacred vessels – one of them is out for re-plating right now, in fact, thanks to a benefactor's gift – and dignified sacred vestments. This external order is meant to help inspire in us greater internal order, which we then also perfect through our growth in virtue and our good use of the sacraments. Yes, this feast day causes us to think about our physical temples called churches, the temple who is Christ, and the temples that we are, too.

In this regard, each year on this day, there is a beautiful passage in the Divine Office from a sixth-century French saint, a bishop named Cesarius of Arles; I want to share an excerpt. He wrote, "When Christ came, he banished the devil from our hearts, in order to build in them a temple for himself. Let us therefore do what we can with his help, so that our evil deeds will not deface that temple. For whoever does evil, does injury to Christ... [B]efore Christ redeemed us, we were the house of the devil, but afterward, we merited the privilege of being the house of God."

And the passage then concludes, "Whenever we come to church, we must prepare our hearts to be as beautiful as we expect this church to be. Do you wish to find [it] immaculately clean? Then do not soil your soul with the filth of sins. Do you wish [it] to be full of light? God too wishes that your soul be not in darkness, but that the light of good works shine in us, so that he who dwells in the heavens will be glorified. Just as you enter this church..., so God wishes to enter into your soul, for he promised: I shall live in them, I shall walk through their hearts."

We pray for ourselves, for our children, and for all: that we will each, having been consecrated to God by baptism, continue to grow – to mature – into a beautiful and orderly center of divine worship, each offering mind, body, and soul to God in union with our Lord Jesus Christ.

And we thank him that we have these inspirational places, especially our beautiful Cathedral of Saint Paul, set apart for God – set apart for us and for all to come, to receive the sacraments, to offer right worship.