

## **Feast of the Dedication of the Basilica of St. John Lateran - Celebrate Being Church**

November 9, 2025

How wonderful that first celebration must have been in Rome and throughout the Church when Pope Sylvester I dedicated the Basilica of St. John Lateran in 324. Up to 313 AD Christians had been persecuted. But with the Edict of Milan in 313, Christianity was recognized by the Empire. Emperor Constantine, prompted by his mother, St. Helena, gave part of his residence, the Lateran Palace, to be used by Miltiades, the Bishop of Rome. Only nine years before in what was truly the lowest point of the Roman Empire, little 12 years old St. Agnes had been paraded through Rome on her way to martyrdom. But in 313 a great change came because now Christians had their own churches, places where they could meet to praise God.

Today's celebration of the Dedication of St. John Lateran reminds us that we are the Church. In the second reading, St. Paul tells the people of Corinth that we are the Temple of God, the Spirit of God dwells in us and we want to make sure this temple of ours is holy by having a close relationship with Jesus Christ. We each speak to him throughout our day. But we recognize that our individual relationship with the Lord comes from our communal relationship to Him. We are the community of the Lord. The Church is our family, our home that is with us from birth till death. It is the Church that provides us with baptism, the sacrament where we are transformed by the Life of God. It is the Church that renews Pentecost within each of us giving us the Power of the Holy Spirit at our confirmation. It is the Church that nourishes us with the Body and Blood of Christ. It is the Church that gives us the gift of penance, forgiveness, and healing, the sacrament of the anointing. It is the Church that elevates marriages from civil relationships to the very presence of Christ in the woman and man's love. It is the Church that provides us with priests to continue our sacramental life. It is the Church that renews the sacrifice of the Cross on our altars every time Mass is celebrated. As Ezekiel says in the first reading, it is from the temple (the church) where the living water flows. It is from the church that God provides our every need and gives us life in abundance. We are the Church.

St. John Lateran is the Pope's church. It is the Cathedral of Rome. We celebrate that church on this feast. At the same time, we also pray for those whose churches are violated. There are Catholics and other Christians throughout the world suffering from attacks while they worship together in their churches. There are many who are victims of those who claim to be acting in the name of God, or in the name of the State, or both, but who in fact are doing the work of the devil. As Church we are one also with these our suffering brothers and sisters. At its heart, this Feast of the Dedication of the Basilica of St. John Lateran helps us remember that we don't celebrate buildings; we celebrate Church.

When my wife and I travel, we enjoy visiting the Churches of the area. Sometimes, we're in a basilica or a Cathedral from the Middle Ages or even earlier. We try to imagine the prayers that had gone up in that Church, prayers during traumatic times, like famines, plagues or wars. Prayers during celebrations like military victories, coronations, and sacraments, weddings and baptisms and ordinations. Sometimes we feel like the rocks of these Churches are alive with the prayers of the people past and present. When we celebrate a Church, be it the dedication of St. John Lateran in Rome or the consecration of any church, we celebrate the people of that Church whose prayers unite them to the Universal Church, rendering the Presence of the Lord real. I still remember the special joy and blessing we received when we were invited by the pastor to attend the re-dedication of St. John the Baptist Parish in Fort McMurray after a complete renovation of the church because of the flood. When we traveled in Spain, a church is only a block away from our hotel. We attended a Sunday Mass. The church interior was under renovation. It was the

famous unfinished work of Antoni Gaudí (1852–1926), the Sagrada Família. The church was jam packed with standing room only. The mass was in Spanish, we did not know what the homily was about but we were familiar with the rituals. The choir even sang the same hymns like ours in Canada. We were happy having the opportunity to receive communion there. Another time, we're in one of the islands on our Caribbean cruise. My wife checked the map and found out there was a Catholic Church. So we went. The church was well built and there were many luxury cars parked outside. We entered and people were nicely dressed. The readings were as in our Sunday Missal. But when there was no communion, we found out it's an Anglican Church. We left in search of the Catholic Church. Not too far on the other side of the street, we found the Catholic Church which was a little run-down. Not too many cars outside but even at a distance, we could hear people singing to the tune of Amazing Grace. As we got closer, we could see people dancing inside and outside. The church was packed, the celebrant had to use a loud speaker to deliver his homily. We received communion from a communion minister. It was such a joyful celebration. We're so happy because we're at home in that church. We went back to the cruise, singing. Whenever we're back visiting our families in Hong Kong, we went back to attend mass in our old parish. On one occasion, it happened to be Chinese New Year when we attended the Sunday mass, the choir was singing the hymns to the tune of some Chinese songs we're familiar with and they were accompanied, not with the organ or piano but with the gong and erhu (Chinese musical instruments). It was very special to us. However different the people, the language and the countries, we noticed the mass rituals are always the same because the Catholic Church is the universal church established by Jesus Christ who is the capstone of our church. Jesus will do everything he can to protect it and all its members because: "Zeal for his father's house will consume him."

In homilies on the dedication of the Lateran Basilica, Pope Francis has emphasized that the basilica, known as the "Mother and Head of all Churches," represents both the history of the Church and the personal, living "temple" of God within each believer. He has connected the physical church to the spiritual one, highlighting that the Holy Spirit dwells in us and that our bodies are temples of God that must be treated as holy. He encourages followers to keep their gaze fixed on Jesus, to walk in God's light, and to become more capable of mercy, patience, and forgiveness through encountering God. So how are we keeping our temple? Jesus says, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21) The Church is our treasure and it is where our heart should be! It is the family God has given to us and it is where we belong!