

Homily for the Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica

Ezekiel 47:1-2, 8-9, 12

1 Corinthians 3:9c-11, 16-17

John 2:13-22

When you hear the word “church” -- what comes to your mind?

Perhaps you think of:

- a building, like this one, where people gather to worship...
- or the word church might lead you to think of worship itself, as when “I’m going to church,” means “I’m going to Mass...”
- or “church” might call to mind the institution, the Roman Catholic Church, with its structure, teachings and authority...
- or perhaps “church” brings to mind a gathering of believers, the church as its people, a community of faith...

Of course, what we have right here, right now is all of the above: we are God’s people, a faith community, we are the church gathered for “church,” for worship, gathered to offer the prayer of the Roman Catholic Church, and we’re doing all this in - a church!

Church is a multi-faceted word and it can elicit all kinds of responses:

- Some see the church as a haven, a refuge, a place of peace... For others it’s a chore, a burden, an obligation...
- For some church means little more than “things I’m not supposed to do” while others understand it as the truth by which they live their lives.
- Some see the institutional church as a sprawling bureaucracy and for some the formal church is kingdom of God on earth.
- For some, church is a problem, a quandary, and an embarrassment - while for others it’s the answer, the solution and a source of hope.
- For some, church is but a vague and distant memory and for others it’s among the heart’s deepest treasures.
- Some see the church as a worn out cliché with no meaning for today while others see it as an ancient compass still guiding us through stormy seas.
- Some hang on the church’s every word while others long ago tuned it out completely.
- Some think of the church as one big guilt machine and for others it’s a gas pump of grace.
- For some, coming to church a couple of times a year is just enough, thank you, and for others every day is not enough.

And in between all these polarities are a thousand shades of gray. But whatever the word church brings to mind, I hope it is still, in every mind and heart, a place to meet Christ Jesus.

Today's scriptures give their own take on what church means.
Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem
and speaks of his own body as the true holy of holies.

St. Paul also personalizes the temple and writes,
"YOU are God's building! YOU are the temple of God."

And Ezekiel describes the temple as a great well-spring
from which flows a river of living water
filling the oceans, nurturing all life and providing healing.
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these scriptures have something to say to all of us.

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WE are God's building; *WE* are the temple of God.
Each of us is one of the living stones in the temple of God.
None of us is the whole temple: I am not. You are not. The pope is not.
But each of us and all of us together
build up that temple that is Christ's body.
Together, we are the living, pulsing, moving, breathing Body of Christ
in this parish we call Holy Family.
More than any church building in Concord or in Rome,
the church is the Body of Christ as it lives in us.

From this body, this living temple, should flow forth healing waters
providing life and sustenance,
especially for the poor, the hungry, the homeless.
Because the church, the Body of Christ, never exists for itself
but always for others.

The author James Joyce is said to have said,
"Catholic means: here comes everybody!"
And there is a universal diversity, true to the root meaning of Catholic,
that marks who we are as a church.
I pray that the doors of our church remain always open
to any and all who desire to seek the truth with us
and who look for communion with us and our Lord.

At the same time, I pray that all who come to the church
will keep minds and hearts open to the depths of truth the church offers
and to the responsibilities our communion places on our shoulders.

Here, in the middle of our church, is the altar of the Body of Christ,
the One who's truth we celebrate, communion with whom is our joy.

May this table, around which we, the church, gather,
provide the nourishment we need
to be the church the Lord has made of us.
the church the Lord calls us to be.

- *Rev. Austin Fleming*