



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Homily for the Dedication of the Basilica of Saint John Lateran 09 November, 2003

Abbot Luke Rigby

Readings: Is. 56:6-7 1 Cor 3:9-13,16-17 Lk. 19:1-10.

Today is the Feast of the Dedication of the Basilica of Saint John Lateran in Rome; it somewhat surprisingly displaces the ordinary Sunday Mass. This Church, known as the "Head and Mother" of all churches, takes precedence over Saint Peter's and is the Pope's own Cathedral as Bishop of Rome.

It is a special blessing that we celebrate this feast in November, the month specially dedicated to the Holy Souls when we pray for those whom the Lord is shaping, maybe putting the finishing touches on, before the full wonder of their vocation is revealed to them - the wonder that they will be with him always.

It gives us a chance not only to pray for those special people in our lives who have died and for all the Holy Souls in Purgatory but also to probe a little into that wonder which is Eternal Life for which they and all of us are destined.

In the Old Testament reading from the prophet Isaias we have a reading in which God speaks through the prophet to his people collectively and to each person individually; he exhorts them to act with right judgment and to be just. He continues by speaking to them not only about themselves but about foreigners; this was a touchy subject for God's chosen people; they treasured, were even possessive about, their being special to God. Yet He's very blunt; foreigners who seek to be faithful to God will also be pleasing to Him - they could even call Jerusalem home and the Temple would also be theirs. What a revelation this is of a God who sees each of his human creatures as individuals and who is pleased when they respond with gratitude and love.

This is astounding enough - but we next have e from Saint Paul in his Epistle to the Corinthians two further and deeper images. The first is that each of us is a part - maybe a brick? - in God's building and that building's foundation is Our Lord Jesus Christ. What an enormous leap forward this image brings us - God has personally come down into us to build us up as part of himself. It is a call to the deepest form of union; we are, in a true sense, absorbed into Him.

Then Saint Paul puts a fascinating twist on to the building image! By so doing he reveals how even more sacred is our vocation! You are - and he is still speaking to all of us here - the Temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you ... and the Temple of God is Holy. I don't need even to suggest that that sacred Word, that sentence of God's, is worth long reflection.

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Finally we come to the Gospel and the delightful story of Zacchaeus. When we in truth hear God calling us and we answer with alacrity as Zacchaeus did, then we see that we need to change, to be converted, to become more Christlike; it is thus that we accept the gift of salvation.

So this celebration of a holy Basilica is a clear reminder to us that we are called to be holy Temples. The dedication reminds us of our Baptism when God's Holy Spirit came to dwell in us. We are reminded of God's call to us to persevere in living our faith even in adversity and amidst failures. At the same time we ask God that those for whom we pray may already have heard those blessed words of Jesus: "Today salvation has come to this one whom I love so much ..."

Finally, when we pray for one deceased may we never let our moment of prayer pass without a deep Thank you to God for the wonder of his promises to us, of His Covenant with us.