

The *Feast* Day of the dedication of St. John Lateran Basilica

Happens to fall on a *Sunday* about once every seven *years*.

And it's happened *again* – *this* weekend.

First of all, there is no *Saint John* whose last name is *Lateran*.

The *St. John* part refers to *both* Saints John – the *Baptist* and the *Evangelist*.

The *Lateran* part refers to the *Lateran family*.

This Basilica was erected in Rome on land that once *belonged* to the *Lateran family*.

Constantine the *Great* donated the land to the church,

When he *decriminalized* Christianity – after its first 300 years of *persecution*.

And just 5 years *later* the Lateran Basilica was *erected* – on November 9 in 324AD.

It was built to be the *Cathedral* church for the *pope*.

We think of *St. Peter's* Basilica as the pope's place –

And it *is*.

But *that* wouldn't be built for another 1200 years *later* than John Lateran –

That first *legally* sanctioned church in Rome in the 300's.

The *pope* is also the *Bishop* of *Rome*.

And just as we have a bishop whose cathedral is in *Albany*,

Rome's bishop has his Cathedral at St. John Lateran's.

It's celebrated across the entire universal (*aka, Catholic*) church *today*.

We *look* to it as our *Mother Church* for *all* our churches in the world.

But *most* of us will never even *see* it.

So who *cares*?

Well, *part* of the beauty of our church –

That is – all the *members* of the Roman Catholic faith –

Is that we are called by Christ to be *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic*.

It's a big *tent*.

And things like the Lateran cathedral in Rome help to *keep* us *united*.

I think of *Abraham Lincoln* –

When the Civil *War* wasn't *going* so great for the *Union*.

Lincoln decided the construction of the *capitol* building needed to *continue* –

Despite *critics* saying it was a *waste* of wartime energy and resources.

Lincoln said: *If the people see the Capitol going on,*

It is a sign that we intend the Union shall go on.

The catholic church is a *sacramental* church –

Since the days of the *apostles* –

God has manifested His *invisible presence* through *visible signs*.

So *let us* gather together –

Remember where we *came* from –

And *utilize* visible signs to *remind* us that we *are* called into God's *presence*.

Not just in beautiful *churches* –

But *as church ourselves – united and universal.*

St. Paul urges the early Christians in Corinth –

To remember their dignity as the living temple of God.

And he's *speaking* to the whole *body* – the whole *assembly* of this Christian community.

We're called *together-as-one* to be the Body of Christ –

Not separately, as some *post-catholic* religious sects get wrapped *up* in –

It's *not* just *me and my God* –

We are the Body of Christ – *together.*

The physical/visible *presence* of God on earth *now.*

Do we *shine* a light on Christ's presence for others to *encounter*?

Do the *experience* Jesus' love in *our* behavior?–

Jesus' *ancestors* built the *first* temple some thousand *years* before Christ.

At *its* dedication –

Spanning about two *weeks* –

About *120 thousand* cattle were sacrificed to God,

And the *blood* would flow out the *right side* of the temple walls.

The people would lose *sight* of God's *presence* there.

They loved the *rituals* and the political-commercial *grandeur* that was carried on in God's *name,*

But they *forgot* God.

And so Jewish tradition tells us that God *left* the temple by the *eastern gate.*

There was no longer *room* for Him there.

It was too *full* of human *pride*.

That temple would be destroyed and the people sent into *exile* from the God of Israel.

But over the next 600 *years* before Christ –

They *opened* their hearts with *humility* –

And *longed* for God's *return*.

And so, He *did* –

Returning through the eastern *gate* of the *rebuilt* temple.

He returned on Palm *Sunday*,

When the Son of God came down the Mount of Olives in the east,

And up to the temple.

And *today's* Gospel finds God's people, *at it again!*

Full of *pride* and love of *signs* more than the God they should *point* to.

Jesus becomes our temple –

The *perfect* dwelling place of God –

So *perfectly one* – is the *union* of divinity and humanity in this Jesus *Christ*.

And *He* becomes the *consummate* temple sacrifice –

The *Lamb of God* –

And *only* by *this* One's blood are we given *life*.

And as the *prophets* foretold –

Blood and water flowed from the right side of this *perfect* temple –

When Christ's right side was *pierced* on the cross of our *salvation*.

Let us *rejoice* in the signs of God's presence –

Jesus' presence on earth *now* –

Including in the transcendent *beauty* of something as *magnificent* as the Lateran Basilica.

But let us *not* forget the *true* temple – Jesus *Himself*.

This Jesus who – by our *baptism* –

Makes *our* hearts – hearts *united* by God's *love* –

Making *us* the Temple of God's loving *presence* –

In *this* little church community.

May we *let* go of the *fearful* and *hateful* and *selfish* things that take up *space* –

And make *room* for God to come – and to *dwell* in our hearts.

Humbly be *open* to *receiving* the love of God –

Receiving the *Lamb* of God –

And having *been fed* –

Go out –

and feed *others* who *still* hunger for the love of God to revive *their* hearts.

And *grow* this temple of the *faithful* – this *one* Body of *Christ* – the temple of the *living God*.