

November 9th: Dedication of the Basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome

Gospel text (Jn 2,13-22): As the Passover of the Jews was at hand, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the Temple court He found merchants selling oxen, sheep and doves, and money-changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the Temple court, together with the oxen and sheep. He knocked over the tables of the money-changers, scattering the coins, and ordered the people selling doves, «Take all this away and stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!». His disciples recalled the words of Scripture: 'Zeal for your House devours me as a fire'.

The Jews then questioned Jesus, «Where are the miraculous signs which give you the right to do this?». And Jesus said, «Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up». The Jews then replied, «The building of this temple has already taken forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?». Actually, Jesus was referring to the temple of his body. Only when He had risen from the dead, did his disciples remember these words; then they believed both the Scripture and the words Jesus had spoken.

«Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up»

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Today, in this universal festivity of the Church we remember that, even though no building in this world is big enough to contain God's immensity, since very long, long time ago, human beings have felt the need to reserve certain locations for their personal and collective meetings with God. At the beginning, the gathering places

for Christians were their private homes, where communities congregated for prayer and the breaking of the Eucharistic Bread. The gathered community was —and still is today— God's Holy Temple. As time went by, these communities have been building edifices devoted to their liturgical celebrations, Word predication and prayer. And this is how, Christianity, from its initial persecutions and abuse to its final religious freedom in the Roman Empire, started to build its great basilicas. Of which, the most important one, is St. John Lateran, Rome's cathedral.

St. John Lateran is the symbol of the unity of all the Churches in the world with the Roman Church, and this is why this basilica proudly displays in its main portico the title of Mother and head of all the churches in the city and in the world (*Omnium urbis et orbis ecclesiarum mater et caput*). It is even more important than St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, the latter not being actually a cathedral, but a shrine built over St. Peter's sepulcher and the Pope's present residence, who, as Bishop of Rome, has in the Lateran Basilica, his Cathedral.

Yet, we should never lose sight of the fact that the true meeting point between man and God, his actual temple, is Jesus Christ. This is why, He was empowered to tidy up his Father's home and to say these words: «Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up» (Jn 2:19). Thanks to the sacrifice of his life for us, Jesus Christ has made out of believers God's living temple. This is why, the Christian message reminds us that all human beings are a sacred reality, where God dwells, and that it cannot be profaned by using it as material means.