



BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF CHICAGO

Dedication of St. John Lateran Basilica, Rome
November 9, 2025
Sr. Susan Quaintance

Ez 47: 1-2, 8-9, 12
Ps 46: 2-3, 5-6, 8-9
1Cor 3: 9-11, 16-17
Jn 2: 13-22

This day is weird. It's Sunday, the sabbath, the moment in each week where, once again, we enter into the paschal mystery, being fed with Word and Bread. But today is also the celebration of the dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome – a building far away that has a rich history . . . but, really? The feast kicks us out of the usual liturgical progression of the Sundays of Ordinary Time and takes over the day? It's weird.

There's a tension in that. And that tension is amplified when we start looking at the readings. Is it about a building? The first reading from Ezekial is about the Temple, and John's version of Jesus chasing the moneychangers out of the Temple might be arguments for the building side. The conversation between Jesus and the Jewish Temple authorities shows how easy it is to be confused. The Jews are talking about a building, and it turns out that Jesus isn't. But Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians is clear that he is talking about them, the people of God. No wonder I am befuddled about this feast, year after year after year.

Let's start with the building at the heart of this solemnity. In the year 324 of the Common Era the emperor Constantine gave the Lateran palace to Pope Sylvester, and a church dedicated to John the Baptist and John the Evangelist has been there ever since. It is the cathedral church of Rome, and the Pope, as bishop of Rome, goes there during Holy Week to preside at the Chrism Mass, just like Cardinal Cupich presides at the Chrism Mass at our Holy Name Cathedral. St. John Lateran existed long before St. Peter's in the Vatican and was the first real home of the Church. It is the mother church (and that's a real ecclesiastical term) of all the Catholic faithful.

Even if I am puzzled about this celebration trumping Sunday, I do understand the idea of sacred space. We all do. This chapel, for our community and also for many other people, is sacred space. Its art and history make it special – communally and personally – but what really makes it holy is what we do here, who we are with around this table. Today might be a good day to think about the other sacred spaces of my life – past and present. Maybe you might do that, too: to describe that place to someone, and listen for what the story tells about myself, yourself.

Perhaps that's a way to frame what Paul and Jesus are saying. "Do you not know that you are the Temple of God – that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" "The temple of God, which you are, is holy." "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up . . . [Jesus] was talking about the temple of his body." Places that help us to be who we truly are – a home for the Spirit of God – are to be celebrated and cherished, even if they are far away or no longer exist. When we physically or metaphorically plant ourselves in those places and let them touch us at our core, what we are when we are not in those places will be as life-giving as the waters that flow from the Temple in Ezekial's prophecy.

As with most things, I need to be more "both/and" and less "either/or" when thinking about this feast. It is about a place and about people. I can be grateful for St. John Lateran, which gave all of us a first home, even though we weren't alive when it was consecrated, or we might never see it. And it is about the people we are called to be by our baptism, our participation in the sacraments, our experience of community, and the sacred spaces of our lives.