

TEMPLUM DEI ESTIS

A Homily for the Dedication of Lateran Basilica: 9 November 2008.

St. Paul's Parish, Gävle, Sweden.

Texts: Ezek. 47: 1-2, 8-9, 12; Ps. 46; 1 Kor. 3: 9–11, 16-17; John 2: 13-22.

“You are the temple of God”. My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, these words we heard from the Second Reading of today are the heart of what the Lord wants us to learn. We celebrate a feast that is important for us as members of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, united under the successor of Peter, the Vicar of Christ. As I'm sure you know the Lateran Basilica is the oldest and the first of the “patriarchal” basilicas in Rome. The original building was a hall, which the Emperor Constantine donated to the Bishop of Rome. Constantine, as you know, converted to Christianity after a victory in a war that he claimed was as a result of the sign of the Cross, which he adopted.

The hall has undergone many changes since the time of the emperor in the fourth century. The basilica, which is the seat of the pope as the bishop of Rome used to also serve as the seat of the pope as the successor of Peter and the leader of the entire Church of Christ as well as the administrative headquarters, functions that the Vatican serves today.

We celebrate with joy the anniversary of the dedication of this great Church, a symbol of our unity as Catholic Christians and also a symbol of the power of Christ over the power of the kings. This Church, which was first dedicated to Christ the Saviour, and later also to St John the Baptist and St John the Apostle, has another feature that is important for our instruction. It has a baptistery that is built on top of what used to be the Roman public bath. And the thought of baptistery brings to our mind the transformational role of our baptism.

Our patron, St Paul teaches us today about our dignity as the new people in Christ. He teaches us that we are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit – the temple of God. The Lateran Basilica or any other church building will lose its significance if there are no Christians to worship in it. Current experience has shown us that a consecrated building can lose its significance if those who own it cease to use it for holy worship. The Methodist Church building, which is a few metres from the location of our own church, has become a mosque – sold by the Methodists to Muslims!

It is very important to respect a building dedicated to God. But it is even more important that we realise that it is we who are the true Church, the Body of Christ, the Temple of God.

The Lord Jesus, himself, teaches us this lesson in a most eloquent manner as we heard in the Gospel text of today. By chasing the people, who turned the temple to a market for dirty profit, out with a whip, he emphasised the need to honour the temple as the house of God, where true worship is offered to the Almighty. But when the angry people confronted him to explain the reason for his action, he changes the meaning of ‘temple’ from a consecrated building to his own body, which he would offer to the Father on the Cross for the salvation of the world, the same body that he raised from the dead on the third day.

My beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. We have been consecrated in baptism. And this means that we are called to honour our bodies. We cannot live like others who do not care about the teaching of Christ. We are called to avoid every act of sexual immorality. The Lord Jesus Christ, offered himself for us on the Cross, to consecrate us for the

Kingdom of God. This is why the instruction of the Apostle Paul is as important today as it was when he wrote to the Corinthians: ***“Do you not realise that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you and whom you have received from God? You are not your own property, then; you have been bought at a price. So use your body for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 6: 19-20).***

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