

Homily for the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica

November 9, 2025

St. Bavo Parish

Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.

First Reading: Ezekiel 47:1-2, 8-9, 12 (Water flowing from the Temple gives life.)

Responsory: Psalm 46 (The waters of the river gladden the city of God, the holy dwelling of the Most High!)

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 3:9c-11, 16-17 (The temple of God, which you are, is holy.)

Gospel: John 2:13-22 (Jesus cleanses the Temple.)

Wow, Jesus was *really* upset! Can you even imagine that scene described in the Gospel? Try to picture Jesus making a whip out of cords and then charging about the Temple area, violently assaulting both man and beast, driving out all the animals and the people selling them. And he doesn't stop there. Next, he overturns the money changers' tables, spilling coins all over the place. Imagine him shouting angrily, "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" The people witnessing these events must have been *astonished*, especially those who had heard Jesus preach and had witnessed his tenderness and compassion. John says that his disciples recalled the words of Scripture, "Zeal for your house will consume me." Well, it consumed him, alright. For a moment, zeal for his Father's house turned Jesus into a *raving lunatic*.

The Jewish authorities couldn't understand why Jesus was so angry, and they took offense at his actions, because they were the ones who authorized those vendors and money changers to do their business at the Temple. The animals were needed to offer sacrifice to the Lord. The money changers were necessary so that people who had only Roman coins could exchange them for shekels, the only currency the vendors would accept when selling animals for sacrifice. Even these religious leaders, who were so careful not to give offense to God in any way, bowed to the practical necessities of having animals and money readily available for the faithful who came to the Temple. But Jesus didn't see all of this commerce as practical necessities; he saw it as a desecration of a holy place. They were profaning the sacred house of the Lord.

I think we can all understand Jesus' reaction, even if it seems very out of character for him. Just imagine how you would feel if someone broke into this church and desecrated it. You wouldn't just be angry that a sacred place had been tainted. You would also feel *personally violated*, because this is a special place where you have encountered God on many occasions. Dishonoring a *holy place*, in effect, dishonors your *encounters with the holy* which occurred there. In a similar vein, the Temple was very personal to Jesus, because it was "his Father's house." He and the Father are one, so dishonoring the Temple dishonors both his Father and his special relationship with the Father.

We honor historic churches like the Lateran Basilica because they are places where people have encountered the grace of God for many generations. They hold special significance for the faithful of the Church, not only because they are beautiful works of art and architecture, but especially because these are *sacred spaces*, where God has touched the lives

of many, many people. Each time we celebrate the dedication of these churches, we remember all those people, too.

The Prophet Ezekiel's vision of the water flowing out from the Temple reminds us that the grace which we encounter in our sacred buildings does not remain confined within the walls of those structures. The Spirit of God touches us profoundly in our prayer and worship, and then we carry that grace with us as we go out into the world. We don't leave our experience of the holy in the church; we take it with us, and we share it with others by the way we live our faith. Moved by love of the Lord, we act charitably toward the people we encounter. They, in turn, do the same for others, multiplying the grace many-fold. It's just like the water in Ezekiel's vision, which trickles out from under the threshold of the Temple and quickly grows into a river. And just as the water flowing from the Temple gives life to everything that it touches, so do the People of God, as they bring Christ to the world.

Jesus once welcomed people to come to him to receive "living water," which brings salvation. That's because he himself became a living "temple" of the Lord. By his Incarnation, he became the new *place of encounter* between God and humanity. God dwelled in him *bodily*, not just metaphorically. Only after Jesus' death and resurrection would his disciples realize just how close they had come to the living God. They ate and drank with him. They saw and heard and touched the "Word of God" made flesh, day after day. What a remarkable experience of grace! Yet, when the Holy Spirit entered them at Pentecost, they felt God's presence in an even more powerful and intimate way. They had become temples of the Lord themselves, for God now dwelt within *them*.

That same Spirit dwells within us and within the community of the faithful. And so, it seems very appropriate that St. Paul would say of us, "You are God's building," that is, God's holy temple. Jesus Christ is the foundation, of course. All of us depend on him for our salvation, and all of us find our truest identity in our relationship with him. All the faithful, throughout the centuries, have been built into this one magnificent structure, where God dwells. Though we are all sinners, the Church that we form is *holy*, for it is the embodiment of Christ in the world. He fills us with his grace, and we make him known to the world.

Not only is the entire Church an embodiment of Christ, but so are we as individual *disciples of Christ*. Our greatest desire is to be formed into a perfect likeness of our Master. We want to become temples of God, like him. And so, we must be zealous to purify our hearts, our minds, and our bodies of all that is not worthy of Christ. That's an ongoing challenge throughout our lives — one that requires both diligence and a measure of compassion for ourselves. We can't be so scrupulous that we fail to appreciate the beauty and sacredness that God's grace has created within us. But, on the other hand, we don't want to become so conditioned by the world around us that we fail to safeguard our holiness, like the religious leaders of Jesus' day, who got used to the temple precincts being a bustling marketplace. From time to time, we will need to examine ourselves critically, to see if our temple walls have become a bit soiled or our gates have fallen into disrepair. And then, confident that our foundation in Christ is still as solid as ever, we can turn to the Lord and ask for his mercy and his healing grace. He will shore up our weakened structure and cleanse all that has been marred by sin. He will make us gleaming temples of the Spirit again.