

## *The Feast of St. John Lateran*

November 9<sup>th</sup> 2019

The Basilica of St. John Lateran dates from about 324, when Constantine (emperor 306–37) converted a portion of the Roman palace of the Laterani into a Christian basilica and gave it to Pope Sylvester I (314–35) to become the papal residence. Because this church was the first in date and the first in dignity—it became the seat and cathedral of the Bishop of Rome—it is referred to as “the Mother and Head of all Churches, in the City and of the World,” as the inscription on the church’s facade indicates. The actual day of the basilica’s dedication is unknown, but in the twelfth century the canons, who staffed the basilica, celebrated the anniversary of its dedication on November 9. At first, this anniversary was celebrated only in Rome, but it was later extended to the whole Church to indicate the unity among the Churches of the world and with that of the Chair of Peter. The basilica is now commonly known as that of St. John Lateran: John because it is dedicated to SS. John the Baptist and John the Evangelist, and Lateran to commemorate the family whose property it once was.<sup>1</sup>

- I have a series of photos that I would like to know show you of the interior of this most important building.

The intent behind the annual feast day is to encourage Catholics to keep strong ties to our past and to the universal Catholic Church. The building of St. John Lateran was a mark of religious freedom. Christians could worship without fear and in a church of their own. Through the grace of God the followers of Jesus had persevered over sufferings and persecutions; Christianity had been granted both legal recognition and public security. What joy those early Christians must have experienced in this newfound freedom, what excitement in joining together in their own house of worship. This feast day reminds us of our Catholic heritage, the significant role the dedication of the Lateran Basilica played in that heritage and the courage of those first followers of Christ and the importance of uniting ourselves to the Holy See. As the pope is our universal pastor, the Lateran is our universal church.

Our readings for today affirm that the Church is to be for the healing of the nations, as Ezekiel celebrates with the image of fresh water flowing from the Temple that then spreads far and wide. In our Gospel we are cautioned to recognize that the Church, like the Temple, can turn in on itself and become corrupt and thereby not bring to the world the healing the Lord desires to be the essence of the Church’s Mission. Our Epistle reminds us of the humility we are to exercise in serving Jesus Christ. He is the foundation and head of the Church and those called to ministry by nature of our baptism have a part to play to build and nurture the Church, realizing that it is the people and not the building that are the true Temple.

May we on this day give thanks for the historical depth and continuity of our Catholic Faith knowing that we are joined geographically and through time to the Church that in Rome has this most beautiful Cathedral that is our Cathedral too.

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<sup>1</sup> Tylenda, J. N. (2003). [\*Saints and Feasts of the Liturgical Year\*](#) (pp. 239–240). Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.