



Learning from History

Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica 9 Nov 2025

Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

“The Lord of Hosts is with us.” (Psalm 46:8)

One of the things you may have missed after the choice of Pope Leo XIV was his going to take possession of the Basilica of the Most Holy Saviour (Saint John Lateran) his Cathedral Church on 25 May. The Dedication of his Cathedral, the first among Cathedrals across the world is marked on 9 November (a Sunday this year). It's a Feast that leads us to ask questions: at its simplest “why do we mark this Dedication across the whole world?” Personally, I found the answer in the first place in those words in the Psalm for the Feast, Psalm 48: “The Lord of Hosts is with us.” That's what every Dedicated Church is a symbol of: the Lord Jesus is with us.

Catholics, and indeed the wider Christian Community, are not necessarily aware that St John Lateran is the Pope's Cathedral Church: they look to St Peter's, the Basilica in the Vatican where the Pope resides today. So his action on 25 May pointed to an important fact which is bound up with history. The Pope is Bishop of Rome and the Lateran Palace became his dwelling way back in the 4th Century (the Palace was originally owned by the Laterani Family.) The Basilica adjacent to it, dedicated to the Divine Saviour, was the first Cathedral in the world: there Baptisms were celebrated on Holy Saturday night – hence the Baptistry alongside - and the Chair in the Sanctuary, from which the Pope, like

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other Bishops, teaches the Faith proclaimed by Peter when Jesus asked him who He was. Peter answered, “you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” (Mt. 16:16). On 25 May the Priests, and Deacons of the Diocese of Rome went to the Cathedral to promise their obedience to him. For about a thousand years, this Basilica, dedicated later to St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist, where 5 Ecumenical Councils of the Church took place, was considered the Mother Church of Rome. Uniting themselves to the Church of Rome, the Churches of the whole world recognise on this day that Rome is the one presiding in charity/the bond of love over the church universal.

Saint Ignatius of Antioch in Syria (died 110) was the first one to describe the Church founded on Christ in this way, as a community of love founded on Faith, on the Sacraments, and guided by the Holy Spirit. This was how Ignatius saw the Church of Rome. In the person of its Bishop, the successor of Peter, having loving authority over the Christian Community, in the service of unity of the Catholic Church in Christ our Saviour.

When Pope Leo took his special Chair, the seat of the Bishop in St John Lateran on 25 May there was applause, and representatives of the Diocese of Rome came forward to offer their allegiance – the Cardinal who looks after the Diocese for the Pope who has such a major role as leader of the worldwide Church from Vatican today – Priests, Deacons, Religious, Laity. The Pope, who was born in America, and became a Peruvian, was heard to say, “Now, I am a Roman!”

In our Burning Bush vlog, we chose 2 pictures for our 10-minute time of prayer and reflection:

- a picture of the “Cathedra” in St John Lateran, the official throne/seat of the Bishop of Rome, a symbol of his teaching authority and his role as

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spiritual leader of the Diocese. The term also refers to the Church that houses the seat i.e., the Cathedral. The Cathedra has roots in ancient Roman chairs used by teachers. Cathedrals reflect the era in which they are built, and the culture of the people and the resources they have. In the Gospel for the Feast of St John Lateran we see Jesus being angry at the way the Temple, so sacred to the Jewish People, was being abused, becoming a market. St John Lateran is a beautiful building, reflecting its sacred character, the House of the Eucharist. I have always felt that we need to safeguard the sacred space that our churches are, and that we should ensure they are spaces that raise the mind and heart to God.

- The second picture we chose was that of the Baptistery at St John Lateran. It is indeed beautiful and highlights the wonder of this Sacrament of Initiation. I remember going to see it again when I was considering our new Baptistry at St George and St Teresa, Dorridge, where I was Parish Priest. Though our Baptistery is not a grand separate building, it does reflect the design of the Baptistry itself around the font! The first reading of the Mass from the Prophet Ezekiel highlights water issuing from the Temple and bringing new life. The Sacrament of Baptism is the beginning of our new life in Christ, and the Eucharist especially nurtures that life in us.

The second reading of the Mass for the Feast is from the first letter of St Paul to the Corinthians where he speaks of our being God's Temple, God's building, a dwelling for his Holy Spirit. The celebration of the Dedication of the Basilica of the Saviour, the place where the Christian community gathers, leads us to reflect on our own Cathedrals in communion with the Church in Rome and how our Churches in communion with Mary and the Saints that many are dedicated to:

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let us thank God for the life of Faith they initiate and nurture in us, and pray that in the Jubilee Year we may be empowered to bring hope to others.

“The Lord of Hosts is with us.”

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