

Dedication of the Lateran Basilica

9th November 2014

'The Temple of God is sacred; and you are that Temple'

Ezek 47: this water comes from the sanctuary Ps 45: the waters of a river
give joy to God's city 1Cor 3: *You are God's building.*
Jn 2: *'stop turning my Father's house into a market!'*

In *several* ways, this Sunday is a 'Remembrance' Sunday:

(1) It is, of course, Remembrance Sunday in the traditional sense, as it has been celebrated for almost 100 years: the end of the First World War, the commemoration of those hundreds of thousands who have given their lives in the armed forces in that war and the conflicts since — and whilst those of my age or younger may not have much recollection of the horrors of World Wars, yet there are still many for whom those tragedies were (and remain) very real. The installation of 888,000 poppies at the Tower of London is a remarkable and moving reminder to us today of the huge and tragic loss of life in the Great War, and indeed in any war. Their remembrance before God very important. A remembrance that reminds us of the supreme price they paid to defend our own lives, and give us, and so many others in conflict zones, a lasting safety.

(2) In the whole Church, today, we make remembrance of a particular church in Rome, the basilica of St John Lateran. This is the Pope's cathedral, and it was alongside this great church

that the Popes resided from the 4th to the 14th c. Way back at the very beginning of the Christianization of the Roman empire, this location was given for a church, and on the 9th November 324AD is was dedicated for its use. On the front of St John Lateran, because it is the Pope's cathedral, it says, "the Mother and Head of all the Churches of the City and the World" ... This shows us that the remembrance of the dedication of the Lateran basilica (or indeed any church) is not about looking back to the past, but giving thanks for the present: we are thankful for the Church's presence right through the past 2000 years of history, which has allowed us, today, to know Jesus Christ. Above all, we give thanks for the papacy — and pray today for the Pope Francis's ministry to the world: a living reality of encouragement and strengthening the Church in faith, mercy and credibility.

(3) Thirdly, here in our own parish church, on this date we have the added poignancy today of remembrance of the years of service to our community by the priests of the diocese. On the 9th November, 56 years ago, Fr Longstaff took over from the Canons Regular of the Lateran, a religious order who had served the parish for 26 years. How much hard work has gone on since then, by the parishioners and priests of this place! Just in those early years, 1958–60, the building of this church and the

Presbytery behind, took enormous dedication and fund-raising. As we remember these 56 years, again, we are not looking back to the past, but we are giving thanks for the present, and looking forward in faith to the future. We are celebrating Mass here in the very church which the parish started out to build, once diocesan clergy came to Hoddesdon — a tangible reminder of just what their hard work and their love for Christ achieved.

In all these elements of remembrance, it's never a looking back in nostalgia, but a thanksgiving in prayer for what we have received as a result: the blessings brought to us by the sacrifices and efforts of those before us. The fact that we live now — especially in the Church — fully alive today is thanks to what they undertook. There were sufferings for them: whether the loss of life of soldiers defending our country; whether the martyrdom in the 3rd c. of the saints in Rome who paved the way for the establishment of the empire as Christian in the 4th c.; whether the time and effort taken to build up this parish by countless of our parishioners, both dead and alive. But this was all so that we might benefit.

It's this joyful theme that is brought out by the readings of the feast: the graces, blessings and peace that spring from being part of the Church. The beautiful first reading speaks of

the streams of goodness that flow out of the Temple, making the world wholesome. Then St Paul says, “The Temple of God is sacred, and you are that Temple.” And as Jesus clears a space for God in the Temple in Jerusalem: we need this space which is not a market for worldly intrusions. The whole sense of this feast is that the Church is a living being, and *brings* to life; that the Church (our prayer and love of God) explains the world; not the world or human psychology which explains (or explains away) the Church. The Church and not the world is the more basic thing, the more fundamental, the more important. The Church comes first ... in the sense that we are made for God before we are made for anything else. So then, our sufferings need not be a source of difficulty — in fact, it is only through those challenges that the Church is built up. So, as we make our ‘remembrances’ today, let us truly remember that Christ is the fullness of our remembrance: the one whose life, death and resurrection we recall because He is here and now our life and our salvation. And this church here, our parish — in communion with Pope Francis in Rome and the Church across the world — brings us that perfect encounter with the living Lord. He died, so that we might live: that's what our parish built this church here for 50 years ago: that *we* might live.