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A homily for the Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica

Date: Sunday, November 9, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C

First Reading: Ezekiel 47:1–2, 8–9, 12

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 46:2–3, 5–6, 8–9 | **Response:** Psalm 46:5

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 3:9c–11, 16–17

Gospel Acclamation: 2 Chronicles 7:16

Gospel Reading: John 2:13–22

Preached at: the Chapel of Emmaus House in the Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe.

“Omnium urbis et orbis ecclesiarum mater et caput.” These words are carved above the doors of the Lateran Basilica in Rome: “Mother and Head of all the Churches of the city and of the world.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today we celebrate more than the dedication of an old building. We remember that God chooses to dwell not only in stone, but in people. The Church is alive when faith is alive in us. (This feast marks the dedication of the first Christian church built after the Edict of Milan — the first time believers could worship openly after the long years of Roman persecution.)

We celebrate this day not just to remember a moment in history, but to remind ourselves of what the Church truly is. The Lateran is more than a monument; it is a living sign of the Church built not of bricks, but of people — of living stones, as Saint Peter says, built together on Christ, the cornerstone. Each of us is part of that same temple God began to build in Rome so many centuries ago.

In the early fourth century, Emperor Constantine gave his family's palace — the Lateran — to Pope Miltiades. On that site a church was built and dedicated in the year 324 to both St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist, and it became known as St John Lateran. It was the first public Christian church, a clear sign that the faith which once hid in the catacombs could now stand in the open. People called it the Golden Church — not for its decoration, but for the faith that filled it.

The Lateran Basilica also stands as a sign of the Church's unity. It is the cathedral of the Bishop of Rome, who is the successor of Peter. Every pope, from the earliest centuries until today, begins his ministry there as Bishop of Rome. This reminds us that the Church is not many separate groups moving in different directions, but one family held together in faith and love. The Lateran points us to that unity — a unity not based on power, but on service, truth, and shared hope in Christ.

The Lateran also reminds us of strong foundations. Like any lasting building, the Church stands firm because it was built on solid ground — on Christ Himself. Saint Paul says, "No one can lay a foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ." The faith of those who came before us was the deep ground on which we now stand.

Pope John Paul II said that the Lateran is "the dwelling of God with us, the temple of the Body of Christ." It reminds us that the Church is more than buildings or offices; it is the people of God joined together around Christ, the true cornerstone.

In the first reading, the prophet sees a stream of water flowing out from the Temple. At first it is only a trickle, but as it moves it becomes deeper and wider, until it is a great river that brings life wherever it goes. "Everything will live where the river flows."

There is something unusual here. The water is shallow at its source but stronger as it moves away. In nature a river grows weaker the farther it travels; in God's way it grows stronger. Grace does not run out when it is shared. It grows. What

begins as a small act of love can become a current that changes lives.

John Paul II said this river “carries life, vigour and hope.” The vision shows what the Church is meant to be: God’s life flowing out into the world.

In Zimbabwe, we know what it means to long for water. We have seen dry rivers and cracked ground. The image of a trickle that becomes a river speaks to us. Grace often starts small — a fair decision in a place of corruption, a kind word in a climate of anger, a small act of honesty or patience. These are streams that join to make a river. God’s life grows as it moves through us.

The psalm today says:

“There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy dwelling of the Most High.
God is in her midst; she shall not be moved.” (Psalm 46:5–6)

That is the promise. The Church may face storms, but it will stand firm if the river of God’s Spirit keeps flowing through it.

St Paul writes to the Corinthians, “You are God’s temple, and God’s Spirit dwells in you.” The Lateran’s stones are a sign of this truth. We, not the walls, are the living temple. When we ignore the poor, the river dries up. When we forgive, when we feed the hungry, when we act with fairness, the river flows again.

The same river rises from every altar. The Eucharist is its source. From this table, grace flows into the world. St Augustine said, “Be what you see and receive what you are — the Body of Christ.” Each Mass renews us as God’s dwelling.

In the Gospel, Jesus enters the Temple and finds people turning it into a market. He drives them out and says, “Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace.” He is not rejecting the Temple; He is reminding us what it is for — to meet God. The disciples remember the words of Scripture: “Zeal for your house will consume me.” That zeal is not only for the stones of the synagogue but for us. St Paul tells us, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple, and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” Jesus’ passion for the Temple is His passion for each one of us. He burns with desire that our hearts be clean and alive with God’s presence.

When He says, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,” He is speaking about Himself. His body is the true Temple. On the cross, from His side, came blood and water — the river of mercy that still runs through the world.

Every twenty-five years the Lateran’s holy door is opened for a Jubilee. It is a sign that God’s mercy is always open. Christ Himself is that door. When He enters our hearts, He does not condemn. He clears space for God to live there again.

The Lateran has long been called the “mother of all churches,” and like any good mother she reminds us who we are and calls us to grow. Her beauty lies not in her walls, but in the life she nourishes — the life of faith that flows from her to every corner of the world.

This feast is not about Rome’s past. It is about us now. We are meant to be temples where God’s Spirit lives and moves. The Lateran has been destroyed and rebuilt many times, but always rebuilt in faith. So can we be. God can restore what has fallen and make it strong again.

The Church is always under construction. Like builders, we sometimes face delays, cracks, and plans that must change. But God is patient, and He asks the same of us — to build carefully, to listen to one another, to trust that He is shaping His Church into something stronger and more beautiful. This is what it means to walk together in faith.

Picture that river from Ezekiel’s vision flowing from this altar into the streets of Harare — through Mbare, through our schools and workplaces, into homes where hope has grown thin. Let the water of compassion and truth move from our worship into daily life until dry hearts come alive again.

Let the river flow: from the altar to the street, from prayer to action, from Rome to Harare, from our hearts into the world. The more grace is shared, the deeper it becomes.

As we end, let us each ask:

- Where in my life is God’s river just beginning to flow?

- Who around me is thirsty for hope or forgiveness?
- What needs clearing from my heart so that His love can move freely again?

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ,

who dwell among Your people,

make this Mother and Head of all Churches a sign of Your mercy for the world.

Renew in us the temple of Your Spirit,

and let Your living water flow through our lives

to bring healing and peace.

Amen.

Source: <https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-11nov-09-yc-ot-32/>

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