

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica. The Lateran Basilica, more properly known as the Archbasilica of Our Most Holy Savior Jesus Christ and Saints John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist ... is usually called, simply, Saint John Lateran.

The original basilica was built on the site of a fort on the Lateran Hill that housed the Imperial Cavalry and Body Guard which was built in 193 AD. After Constantine I beat the emperor Maxentius, he tore down the fort, and gave the adjoining palace and property to the pope, around the year 312 AD.

From that point on, for about 1,000 years, the popes lived in the Lateran Palace, and the Lateran Basilica became the cathedral church of Rome in the year 324 AD.

It was so richly appointed that it was known as the Golden Basilica. This, of course, drew the attention of the Visigoths and the Vandals who sacked Rome and stripped the basilica of its treasures.

It was restored by Pope Leo around the year 460 AD, and Pope Hadrian sometime in the 8th century.

Near the turn of the 10th century, it was nearly destroyed in an earthquake, and subsequently rebuilt. This church lasted for 400 years before it was burned to the ground in 1308, rebuilt, and then burnt roughly 50 years later. And again rebuilt.

Around this time, the popes had moved to France, and on the return of Pope Urban VI to Rome; the palace was in such disrepair that the pope moved his residence to Saint Peter Basilica on the Vatican Hill. And while the pope has remained in residence at Saint Peter's, his cathedral remains Saint John Lateran.

At the entrance of the basilica an inscription reads "Holy Lateran Church: Mother and head of all churches in the city and the world." There are 15 statues on the roof of the statue, each 20 feet tall. In the center is Christ, who is flanked by St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist, and the remaining 12 statues are – not the Apostles – but

twelve Fathers of the Church: Ss. Bonaventure, Bernard, John Chrysostom, Athanasius, Ambrose, and Gregory the Great, on the left; and Ss. Jerome, Augustine, Basil, Gregory Nazianzus, Thomas Aquinas, and Eusebius of Vercelli, on the right.

In the Introit for today's Mass, we hear from Genesis, where Jacob had a vision of angels coming and going ... to and from heaven, and he exclaims: "*This is the House of God and the gate of Heaven.*" While we celebrate the dedication of the Lateran Basilica, this can be applied to any church building – where the Mass is offered, and the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the Tabernacle.

St. John in the Apocalypse sees the new Jerusalem, the coming of God's holy presence where "*He will dwell with [His holy people.]*" Our Lord ends the reading proclaiming: "*Behold, I make all things new.*"

And finally, in the Gospel, Jesus tells Zacheaus, telling him "*this day I must abide in thy house.*" And at the end of the Gospel declares, "*This day is salvation come to this house.*"

And this is the purpose of any church: to bring salvation and renew God's holy people. Because Our Lord is not obliged to abide with us, but rather intends that He must abide with us.

From the time the barracks were built on the Lateran Hill one-thousand, eight-hundred, twenty years ago ... until now, empires and governments have come and gone ... popes and priests, saints and sinners ... yet the Word of God remains. And Jesus Christ remains a moving force not only in our hearts but in the world.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, let us pray for perseverance ... and a deeper awareness of God's abiding presence among us ... may we continue to welcome Jesus Christ into our hearts and homes ... and especially into our daily lives ... remembering that when we come to God's holy temple ... as His holy people ... we are united in Christ, and sent forth to be Apostles of His Gospel ... to the world.