

THE DEDICATION OF THE LATERAN BASILICA 9TH November

We celebrate this feast because the Lateran Basilica is the cathedral church of Rome and the chief and mother church of all churches in the world. It was the official residence of the Popes from the 4th century until 1309 when Pope Clement V moved to Avignon. The gospel reading gives us John's account of the cleansing of the Temple and Jesus justifying his actions with the words, 'Destroy this sanctuary and in three days I will raise it up.' In the first reading we hear how the waters that flow out from the Temple were wholesome with 'all living creatures teeming in it with life.' In the second reading Paul teaches the Corinthians that they are God's temple.

The **First Reading** is from the prophet Ezekiel, one of the major prophets of Israel. It is thought his whole ministry was among the exiles in Babylon. The Exile lasted from 587 to 538 B.C. Called by God to maintain the faith of the Israelites during this traumatic period of Jewish history, Ezekiel's entire teaching centres on inner conversion: we must achieve a new heart and a new spirit, see Ezk.36.26. The Temple was his ruling interest and he holds the Law in veneration. Ezekiel is primarily a visionary, his four visions occupy a substantial part of the book. The Messiah is not to be a king but a shepherd who will look for individual rather than collective reparation. The book is divided into four parts: 1. Threats and reproaches addressed to the Israelites. 2. Proclamations against the nations. 3. Comfort during and after the siege of Jerusalem. 4. Provisions for a new political and religious constitution after the Exile.

The reading, 47.1-2,8-9,12, is taken from the last section of the prophecy which is blueprint for the religious and political rehabilitation of the Israelite nation in Palestine after the exile. The section has spoken about the rebuilding of the Temple and now complete the prophet is taken by an angel to see the living waters flowing out 'from under the Temple threshold....down to the Arabah and to the sea.' The Arabah meaning the deep depression of the river Jordan and the sea the Dead Sea whose bitter waters are to be sweetened. The waters themselves are teeming with life and the vegetation on the banks of the river dependent on the water of the river 'bear fruit every month because this water comes from the sanctuary.' Even the leaves are medicinal with healing powers. The image is that the Temple is a source of abundant life in the spiritual sense.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 45.2-3,5-6,8-9, celebrates God's presence among us. God is at hand we have nothing to fear should the foundations of the earth totter and the sea pound against the mountains. The second verse takes us back to the first reading and God's presence is our surety. The last verse confirms again God's assuring presence among us.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Paul evangelised the church at Corinth between A.D. 50 and 52. His policy was to establish the Christian faith in a centre of population, and here he chose the great and populous port of Corinth, so that the faith could people, but Corinth was a centre of Greek life, philosophy and religions. It was also a notorious centre of immorality which was to cause problems for the newly converted. In 1 Corinthians Paul addresses urgent problems that faced the church there and the decisions that had to be made to address these problems such as moral conduct, marriage and virginity, liturgical and Eucharistic meetings, charisms, matters concerning the Church and the world, appeals to civil courts, eating foods sacrificed to idols. Paul's religious genius enabled him to use all these problems as a vehicle to expound the profound doctrines of Christian liberty, the sanctification of the body, the supremacy of love, union with Christ. Paul teaches the Corinthians that there is only one master, Christ, and only one message, the cross which is the one true wisdom.

The reading, 3.9-11,16-17, in the first part speaks in building terms with Christ as the foundation but the second part of the reading teaches about the spiritual reality which is this building. 'Didn't you not realize that you were God's temple and that the Spirit of God was living among you?' It is the Christian community, the Body of Christ, which is the Temple of the new covenant and the Spirit that lives in it makes it a reality of what was prefigured by the Temple of Jerusalem in which lived the glory of God. Hence Paul's warning in the final sentence.