

DEDICATION OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL BASILICAS November 18, 2020

One thing that differentiates human beings living in community from flocks of birds or herds of animals or schools of fish or swarms of insects is that we humans are, and always seem to have been, TEMPLE BUILDERS.

Whether Aztecs or Mayans, Babylonians or Egyptians, Tibetans or Cambodians, Greeks or Romans, Jews or Christians, we build or have built and adorned large buildings, and then we dedicate them to whomever or whatever our particular god or goddess or group of gods happens to be.

This seems to have been the case all throughout human history on every continent. And where we usually are for worship and what we do is living and concrete proof of this felt human need for temples, for dedicated places, for special buildings in which to worship our deity or deities.

Each year in our Church calendar we celebrate the dedication of the most important churches in Rome, the four Papal Basilicas: on August 5, St. Mary Major, the first great church dedicated to Mary; on November 9, St. John Lateran, the Pope's Cathedral; and today, nine days later, St. Peter's and St. Paul Outside the Walls, the burial places of the two greatest Apostles.

The origins of both these buildings go back to Emperor Constantine in the early 300's, who gave them to the Bishop of the Catholic Church that he had just made legal. The re-construction of today's St. Peter's, the world's largest church, was completed in 1626. That of St. Paul, which burned down in 1823, was re-dedicated in 1855.

As verified by excavations done from 1939-1950, St. Peter's contains his burial place, and as determined in 2009 St. Paul's has the tomb of this apostle.

But we also celebrate on this feast the marvelous reality, that just as we humans-in-community build temples for our God to dwell in, so has He

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likewise, with great care and love, fashioned and adorned in varying degrees, each one of us as His Temple, in whom He might dwell -- for His glory and for ours.

It is not just our soul that is a temple of God, but our body as well. If we are sensitive to this, we will take good care of our body, not just for our own sake, but because our body too is God's dwelling place, His earthly temple.

And, yes, every Catholic church, however grand or humble in size and adornment, is God's temple. It is more than just a space for preaching and hymn singing. Jesus is in our churches, both at Mass and apart from Mass, through His Real Presence in the tabernacle. Every church is a place that demands our reverence. It is intended to be a place of peace and a place where we can encounter God most directly and find meaning there for our lives.

God has given us many temples where we can experience Him. Some are buildings, some are people. We must never forget that we too are temples for ourselves, temples for others, and temples for God.

St. Paul wrote so beautifully to the people of Corinth these words: **YOU ARE GOD'S BUILDING. DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT YOU ARE THE TEMPLE OF GOD, AND THAT THE SPIRIT OF GOD DWELLS IN YOU?**

And Paul adds: **THE TEMPLE OF GOD, WHICH YOU ARE, IS HOLY.**

The re-dedication of the Temple in December of 148 BC is the origin of the Feast of Hanukkah which Jews still celebrate today, and which we learn in John chapter 10 that Jesus Himself went to Jerusalem to take part in.

Finally, the Gospels tells us how concerned Jesus was for maintaining a sense of the sacred, of reverence and respect in the Temple, something we should also always strive for in our churches and in our liturgies.