

Each village or city has a church. Saint Ann in Teller, Saint Jude on Little Diomedea, Saint Joseph in Nome. The main church for the Diocese is Sacred Heart Cathedral in Fairbanks, home to the chair of the bishop.

In the Roman Catholic Church, the mother church for the Diocese of Rome is the Lateran Basilica. It is about 2 ½ miles outside of the Vatican and it predates Saint Peter's Basilica. When the era of Christian persecution ended in the early 4th century, Emperor Constantine donated land for the construction of this church. The land came from the Lateran family and so the basilica bears the name of the original benefactor making the church possible. On November 9, in the year 324, Pope Sylvester dedicated the original church. "That structure and its successors suffered fire, earthquake, and the ravages of war, but the Lateran remained the church where popes were consecrated... Pope Innocent X commissioned the present structure in 1646."ⁱ According to tradition, the church holds in its treasures, the remains of a small wooden table on which Saint Peter, the 1st Pope celebrated Mass.

When the church was new it was dedicated to the Most Holy Savior. The names of Saint John the Baptist and John the Evangelist were added only after the sixth century. Originally, the dedication of the church was celebrated only in Rome. Beginning in 1565, the celebration of the mother church for the Diocese of Rome was extended throughout the world. In the 18th century, Pope Clement XII added an inscription cast in stone to the face of the building. The basilica is the "mother and head of all churches of Rome and the world."ⁱⁱ

In having a special feast day for one church, we cannot overlook that the church is built of living stones with Christ at its head. Referring to the Temple in Jerusalem that took 46 years to build, Jesus said "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). After Jesus was crucified, he rose from the dead on the third day. With coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the temple was replaced by the church where the Christian community gathers to celebrate the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone" (Eph 2:20). The living stones of the church are its members. "Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord; in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (21-22).

In recognizing the mother church, the Lateran Basilica in Rome, we also recognize churches in every community around the world. The readings of this solemnity reveal an essential truth: "The temple of bricks is a symbol of the living Church, the Christian community, which the Apostles Peter and Paul already, in their letters, were understanding as a 'spiritual building,' constructed by God with the 'living stones,' which are the Christians, over the unique foundation, which is Jesus Christ, called the 'cornerstone.'"ⁱⁱⁱ

With a church built of living stones, we bear a responsibility to reach out to those in our own communities who are far from the faith and the church. As Pope Francis teaches, "there is no human heart in which Christ does not want and cannot be reborn."^{iv} If the Temple of Jerusalem can be torn down and rebuilt in three days, then sin can tear us down as we turn away from the Lord. Yet the Lord can rebuild the human heart as well.

As living stones, let us reach out to our neighbors especially during this period of isolation. "May the Lord rejoice in seeing us on the move, ready to listen with his heart to his poor who cry to Him ... Meet others, enter into dialogue with them, listen to them with humility, gratuitousness and poverty of heart."^v

ⁱ franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/dedication-of-st-john-lateran

ⁱⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope_marks_feast_of_dedication_of_lateran_basilica

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-urges-catholics-to-meet-the-poor-and-speak-to-them-with-love-19403

^v Ibid.