December 13, 2021        12:10 p.m.        St. Augustine Cathedral

First Anniversary of Rededication of our Cathedral/St. Lucy, Virgin/Martyr

(Is.56:6-7; Eph.2:19-22; Lk.19:1-10)

“And Jesus said to Zacchaeus: “Today, salvation has come to this house....For the Son of Man has come to seek, and to save, what was lost.” Those beautiful words which Jesus spoke so tenderly to Zacchaeus remind us why Jesus has come into our world----Why we are preparing our hearts once more to welcome and celebrate His Birth in less than two weeks on Christmas----Why we gather together each week, and some of us every day, to avail ourselves of that Saving Grace which Jesus came to win for us by His suffering, death and Resurrection, and which we receive each and every time we come together in this, or any, “House of Prayer” thru the celebration of the Eucharist. He has come to “seek those who are hiding their Lights thru Sin, and to save those who are in danger of being lost, by inviting Himself into our lives---our homes---our Houses of Prayer, just like He did with Zacchaeus. He has come to “be with us” and to give Himself completely to us so we can have the strength to be His witnesses in the world, and to allow our Lights to shine for all to see.

How wonderful it is for us to celebrate together this First Anniversary of the Rededication of our Cathedral. But how difficult it is for me to believe that it’s already been a year. One year ago, we were all getting used to this “new and improved” Cathedral Church; and like anything new, it took some time to figure out how everything works. We can truly say with today’s Psalm: “How lovely is Your dwelling place, Lord, mighty God.” (Ps.84) But now, an entire year has gone by; we have celebrated a complete Liturgical Cycle from Advent, to Christmas, the Season of Lent, the Rite of Election, the Sacred Triduum, the Easter and Pentecost Season, and the Ordinary Time of the year. We have celebrated a Priestly Ordination, our Diocesan 50th Anniversary celebration, a large number of celebrations of the Sacrament of Confirmation for hundreds of our young people from throughout the Diocese, the launching of this Jubilee Year of the Holy Spirit, and the Opening of the Synod on Synodality which will conclude around the same time as our Jubilee year of the Holy Spirit will---at Pentecost. And in addition to those special “moments”, our Faithful people, parishioners and visitors, day in and day out, come here, to this House of Prayer, to encounter the Saving Grace that Jesus provides for us through His Church and the Sacraments.
That’s what God intends---for His Holy People to come together to experience His Love and to sing His praises. That’s what we heard Isaiah prophesying in God’s Name in today’s First Reading: “All who hold to My covenant (including Foreigners), them I will bring to my holy mountain and make joyful in my House of Prayer----For my House shall be called a House of Prayer for all peoples.”

St. Paul urged his dear people, the Ephesians, to “no longer be strangers and sojourners, but members of the Household of God.” When we gather together here as God’s holy people, there can be no distinction, and there should be no division, among us. Because we come together here to be One with Jesus. As St. Paul reminded us: “It is through Him that the whole structure (this building, but also our Faith Community) is held together, and grows more and more into the Temple of the Lord”. But that can only be so if you and I---all of us who are God’s People---continue to allow ourselves also, as St. Paul said, to “being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

That’s our life-long process. That’s what it means for us to continue “growing in holiness”---a process that began on the day of our Baptism, and won’t be completed until the day we pass from this life into Eternity. Until then, we need to continue “growing” and “being built into” something much more sacred, beautiful, and worthy for the Lord Who keeps coming to “seek and save us who are lost”.

Today, as you probably know, is also the Feast of St. Lucy, a 4th century Virgin/Martyr. Her life in this world was short; but her impact has been everlasting because of the way she allowed her life to be a bright “Light” that reflected Christ, and her courage to remain strong in her faith no matter what the personal consequences. She was one who had her “house of prayer” in order, and Jesus had definitely built her into a beautiful spiritual structure.

In the Office of Readings today for her Feast Day, St. Ambrose wrote this: “Maintain this house, sweep out its secret recesses until it becomes immaculate and rises as a spiritual temple for a holy priesthood, firmly secured by Christ, the cornerstone, so that the Holy Spirit may dwell in it. Whoever seeks Christ in this way, whoever prays to Christ in this way, is not abandoned by Him; on the contrary, Christ comes again and again to visit such a person, for he is with us until the end of the world.”
Let us follow the example of St. Lucy, Virgin and Martyr; let us allow our very lives to be beautiful “houses of Prayer” where the Lord can dwell, and which reflect the Light of Christ to others. Let us, like Zacchaeus, do whatever it takes to seek after the Lord, knowing that in the end, it is the Lord Who has found us. Let us ask the continued intercession of our Patron, St. Augustine, to not allow our restless hearts to rest in anyone or anything else but Him. Let us pray that Our Blessed Mother will continue to draw us closer to her Son Jesus every time we come together in this holy House of Prayer. And may the Holy Spirit, in this special “Jubilee Year” continue to in-spire and en-courage us to be faithful, and joyful, witnesses of Jesus in this world.

As I said in my Homily a year ago today: “May we rededicate not just this Cathedral, but let us also rededicate our hearts and our very selves. The glory and beauty of this Cathedral should encourage each of us to renew and beautify our own lives as we move forward on our Journey of Faith. Let us pray that because of God’s abiding Presence here in this Church, our hearts too will become more worthy places where the Lord can make His Temple. (My Homily from the Mass of Rededication December 13, 2020).

God bless you.