

Have you ever been in a building 333 feet long! That's ten yards longer than a football field. That's the length of the Basilica of S. John Lateran in Rome . The original church was built by Constantine, the first emperor who showed great favor to Christianity in the three hundreds; He then gave the church and the palace next to it to the pope for his residence and his Cathedral.

St. John Lateran became the "Vatican", the home for the pope for the next thousand years. Only in the 1500s did the pope move to St. Peter's.

There still remains in the Church of St. John Lateran, the Cathedra, the chair, which is the sign of the bishop of Rome. And Rome is the first among equal of all the dioceses in the world.

Every year on November 9 we celebrate the feast of the Dedication of the Church of St. John Lateran with the reading of the votive mass of a dedication of church and take time to reflect on exactly "church" is.

In the words of today's Gospel Jesus tells us what a church is NOT. In the second chapter, we find Jesus in Jerusalem cleansing the temple.

The temple had become a place to buy and sell animals for sacrifice and a place to exchange coins; In Jesus' eyes, it had become a center for business. It had ceased to be a house of prayer.

After cleansing the temple he says if this great temple is destroyed, he will rebuild it in three days.

But the Jews retorted. How can you rebuild the temple in three days; we have been working on it for 46 years and it is still not finished.

Then John's gospel tells us that Jesus was referring to the temple of his body. It would be destroyed on the cross and then be "rebuilt" in the resurrection three days later.

"Destroy THIS BODY, this temple, and I will rebuild it."

Jesus teaches us that the Church is not so much a building.

The Church is the risen Body of Christ with the risen Lord as our head and we as the members.

In today's second reading from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians chapter 3: Paul says very directly, "you are God's temple. His Spirit resides in US! Then Paul gives us a "physical" description of the temple.

- Paul and the other apostles laid the foundation;**
- Jesus is the very cornerstone (explain the cornerstone),**

- **but YOU AND I are the temple....living stones...we form the temple of God, and the temple of God is holy.**

Jesus' words reminds me of the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus tells her that the Samaritans worship God in a temple in Samaria, Jews worship in a temple in Jerusalem. But God is to be worshipped, not simply in a building in Samaria or Jerusalem or Rome or Detroit, but he is to be worshipped within us, in Spirit and Truth.

That leads us to the powerful reading from Prophet Ezekiel 47:

- **People in exile in Babylonia and the prophet Ezekiel, has these fantastic visions.**
- **We know that Ezekiel is from the priestly tribe of Israel.**
- **He dreams of rebuilding of the temple destroyed at the time of the Babylonian invasion;**
- **He gives an exhaustive description of the new temple.**
- **Then, in chapter 47 verses 1-12, he has a vision which brings us to the great temple in Jerusalem which is located at the highest hill in the land. Water begins flowing from the temple from the north and the south and the east and the west...all four sides. First the water is ankle deep, then knee deep, then waste deep,**

then it flows over our head. Water is just gushing forth from the temple!

And so where does all this water go? In the vision of Ezekiel, it heads out of the temple; out of Jerusalem; out to the desert; out to the salt sea where nothing grows. Out to the dry places in our lives. The water will refresh EVERYTHING it touches. It rushes out to the Dead Sea, in the sea which nothing can live, and refreshes it so that fish of every kind will grow in it.

And trees along the banks of this river flowing from the temple will grow and blossom. They are just not any kind of trees, but fruit trees which will blossom and provide fruit, not every year, but EVERY MONTH, fruit which will provide food for the hungry and its leaves will be medicine to heal the sick.

Wow! What a vision of what church is. Not a building, but the Church is US, the body of Christ, with Jesus as the cornerstone. His healing Spirit flows through this body out from the walls of this church through us down Evergreen and Pembroke and Eight Mile to every neighborhood where the drought of depression and discouragement reigns. The Spirit flows out bringing healing and life to all who seek life.

Scripture teaches us that the Church is not a building. The Church is a people alive with the Spirit of the risen Lord.

Let me tell you a story about my experience of church, of our church taking flesh in our community refreshing the downhearted. About what happened in this place of worship last Monday.

- Young man, 23 years old, comes in at the end of mass.**
- Talked with him after mass**
- He was wearing a tether**
- On parole for a felony.**
- Needed to put in hours of community service**

Just then another young man comes in. He is one of the young men from Better Men Outreach program. He is going to college and working. He brought his friend in to find help.

I take the man on parole aside. He tells me his story; what he had done wrong; now he wants to right his life for the sake of his little girl; how is he looking for the strength of a faith community to help him on the journey.

All of a sudden the waters of the river gladden the city of God. The waters of the faithful here at Corpus Christi are overflowing into the heart and mind of this young man. What happened last Monday was

more impressive to me than any church in Rome 333 feet long. The Church, the living Church, was experienced by that young man, brought to the Body of Christ for healing and refreshment.

My brothers and sisters, WE are the Body of Christ. WE hold within ourselves the power to heal and refresh. May we leave this assembly and bring refreshment and peace to a parched and troubled world.